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THE PRIMAL LAW

BY

ISABEL OSTRANDER

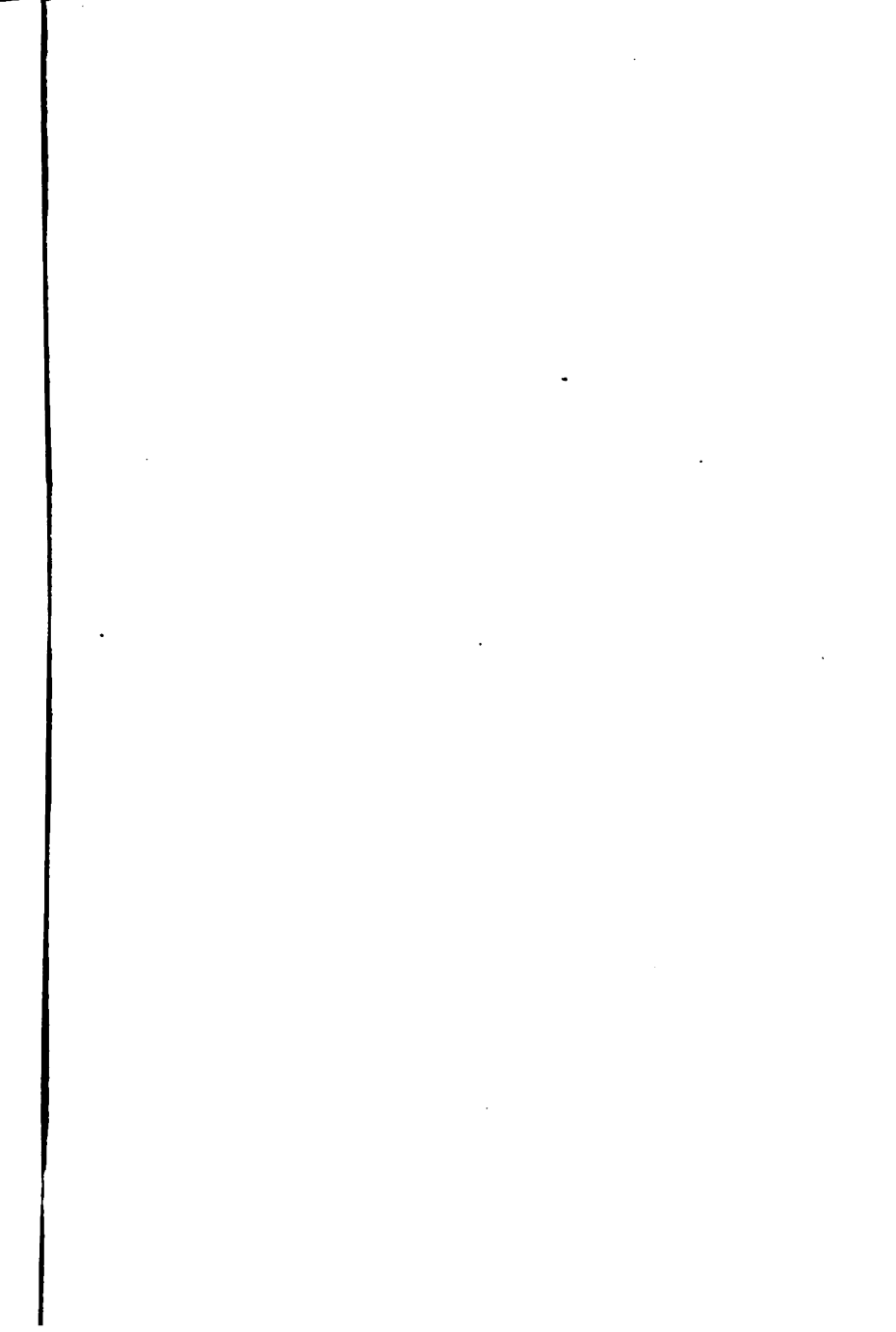
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THE PRIMAL LAW



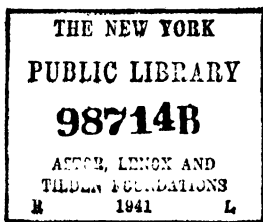
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Excerpt from "The Doer of Good,"

By Oscar Wilde.

"... And after a little while He saw one whose face and raiment were painted, and whose feet were shod with pearls. And behind her came, slowly as a hunter, a young man who wore a coat of two colors. Now the face of the woman was as the fair face of an idol, and the eyes of the young man were bright with lust.

And He followed swiftly and touched the hand of the young man and said to him, "Why do you look at this woman and in such wise?"

And the young man turned round and recognized Him and said, "But I was blind once, and you gave me sight. At what else should I look?"

And He ran forward and touched the painted raiment of the woman and said to her, "Is there no other way in which to walk save the way of sin?"

And the woman turned round and recognized Him, and laughed and said, "But you forgave me my sins, and the way is a pleasant way."

And He passed out of the city.



THE PRIMAL LAW

CHAPTER I

THE rain, which fell in slanting sheets, pelting like hail upon the narrow, broken sidewalks, and swirling along the gutters in an unstemmed tide of yellowish foam, beat relentlessly upon a group of bedraggled little figures winding their way down the long hill to the town. Their frail bodies bent and swayed soddenly in the face of that blinding, drenching onslaught, their poor soaked garments clung miserably to their gaunt limbs, and the small feet sloughed up and down drearily in their battered shoes. Yet they trudged on apathetically, without haste, on their dulled faces only a look of dogged weariness. The children were coming home from the mills.

Now and then, one of the smallest would lag back, and then summon its courage for a final spurt to reach the side of an older, stronger girl, and tuck a little hand under some good-natured arm, for a lift upon the way. There was no talk among them, they were saving their meagre breaths to combat the storm. On their drooping, haggard young faces was no hint of a smile — they were like dumb driven cattle, worn with toil. — And they were in the hours of youth which should have been golden!

They reached the bottom of the hill at length, and

an older girl turned away from the rest, and disappeared down one of the alley-like side streets. She was almost a woman, tall and slender, with a curious, graceful sweep of her lithe limbs, and as she walked, she held her flat-chested, immature figure erect in the sharp gusts of wind and rain. She was, at first glance, an insignificant little creature, with nothing to lift her above the hundreds of other pallid, half-starved toilers from the mills. But the straggling masses of hair under her battered hat were a rich red-gold, the colorlessness of her face was accentuated by the perfect scarlet line of her lips, and her long, narrow eyes glowed from under their heavy lids like those of a sullen, tawny cat.

The street was even more squalid than the one she had left,—ramshackle tenements leaned crazily against one another's shoulders, dark save where the occasional blur of light gleamed through the rain from an opened saloon door. Cries, oaths, and strange sounds of scuffling near at hand assailed the girl's ears, but she passed on, unconcerned. This was home.

Mingled odors, of hot, rancid grease, cheese, beer, and onions floated out to her. Then she heard the wailing of a sick child, and a hoarse voice roughly silencing it. Once a man passed her, lurching and splashing through the running gutters, and swearing horribly. The girl started to overtake him, but something in his floundering stride made her pause, and loiter far in the background. It was her father, and she recognized the signs.

She had neared the old tumble-down frame house, in which her people existed, when with obvious alacrity a broad-shouldered figure sprang out of the gloom at her side.

"My kingdom!" she gasped, with as well simulated



surprise as though this were not a nightly custom. "How you scared me, Ben!— An' you waitin' here'n this rain,—you're a fool!"

The young man reddened in the darkness.

"I'd wait all night in the rain for you, Mary!" he gulped.

The girl merely quickened her pace, without replying, and the boy could not see her shiver.

"I wisht yer wouldn't hurry so," he said, laying his hand upon her arm. "I tried to get a chance ter speak ter yer t'day, just after lunch-hour, but the foreman was stickin' so clost I couldn't." Then as she still was silent his hand tightened upon her arm and he made as if to pull her back, adding, with a note of sullenness in his voice, "What's the matter, anyway, Mary? You ain't been the same ter me lately, somehow."

"Matter?" she jerked away from him suddenly, and faced half about, her tawny eyes snapping fire. "I'm hungry, an' cold, an' tired out, if you want ter know, Ben Donahue! An' you're keepin' me here in the rain, gettin' my death for your nonsense!"

"Nonsense, is it?" His sullen temper burst into flame, and he thrust his pugnacious face close to hers. "Yer wasn't catchin' yer death when yer stood for a quarter of an hour with the rain pourin' down on yer, talkin' ter that New York salesman, that Beeman, this mornin', was yer?"

"Well, I ain't goin' ter stand here now, an' let you jaw at me—I'm goin' home."

She turned again, and splashed resolutely off, while he, his angry voice changed to a whine, kept pace with her, and sought to mollify her.

"Oh, do let me alone!" she cried at last, not un-

kindly, however. "I'm cross to-night, Ben,— I'm just tired out. I'll see you to-morrow, sure."

"Say, Mary," he stopped a few steps from her door. "I ain't goin' clear to the house. Your ol' man's been drinkin' again."

"I know it," she returned, in a matter-of-fact way. "Saw him down the street."

To her, there might be personal unpleasantness connected with such a condition of affairs, but no cause for embarrassment. In a community where sobriety was the exception, it would not have occurred to her to consider her father a disgrace, and she was indifferent to him,— save when her arms were purple with the clutch of his brute fingers, or she saw her mother fall beneath his iron fist.

Nevertheless, it was with a feeling of sick disgust, more strongly marked than ever before, that she took leave of Ben and entered the kitchen. She suddenly felt a loathing for it all,— her mother's dirty, uncorseted figure; her slatternly sister, nursing her baby; the withered grandmother, looselipped, senile; the father with his lowering brutish face, and her brother, a replica of him; even the food her mother was putting on the table, — cold fried pork, a crumbly loaf of sour bread, and a pot of rank black tea! She turned away with a shudder.

"Yer get yer money?" the father asked, gruffly, his red-rimmed, watery eyes fixed upon her with a sudden gleam of cupidity.

"Yes." Mary slowly took from her pocket the few dollars she had just received that afternoon,— her week's miserable stipend for the toil of twelve hours a day in the rush and roar of countless machines.

"Well, give it here!" When he saw that she hesi-

tated, he ripped out a string of vile oaths, and there was a hint of menace now in the drunken voice. He took a step nearer.

"Look here, Pa," Mrs. Tinney interposed abruptly, turning her flushed face from the stove. She was a thin, faded wisp of a woman with the dull apathetic look of one driven upon a ceaseless treadmill. Now, however, a faint spark of protest snapped in her sunken eyes. "Mary's just got to hev a pair o' shoes. Hers is so broken they won't stay on her, nohow!"

"Who says so!" He was in a flaming rage in a minute. "Them're good enough fer 'er! — Yer gimme that money, or it'll be the worse fer yer!"

"I don't care!" The mother forgot her years of habitual cringing. "The money's Mary's by right. She earned it,—you didn't! An' it'd better go fur shoes fur the poor child's feet, then into Shannon's saloon!"

"Oh, Mother!" Mary sighed. 'After her hard day's work the wrangling beat unbearably upon her ears. "I can do without the shoes,—here, Pa, take the money!"

"Jennie, yer better come an' eat." Dismissing the matter with a shrug of her thin shoulders, Mrs. Tinney wiped her hands on her apron, and sat down behind the teapot, and the meagre supper began in sullen silence. The male members of the family ate and drank noisily, intent only on getting through and out as quickly as possible.

"Say, Ma, did yer know Bessie Price was back? I forgot to tell yer." It was the slattern, Jennie, who spoke, and her hard eyes gleamed with vindictive resentment.

"Well, I wouldn' a' b'lieved that hussy would 'a' showed her face again in this town, I can tell yer!

I s'pose it's 'cause her ma's dyin'.— How'd she look? ”

“ Bold as brass, an' sassy, too! The girls says they wouldn't none of 'em speak to her, but she sailed right along, an' acted like she didn't see nobody. She was dressed grand, too, with a silk dress, an' a silk umbrella, an' a big hat with feathers,— her that used to work 'side o' me at the mills! ”

Mary took no part in the further remarks, half-envious and wholly venomous, in which her mother and sister indulged. Her thoughts had flown back to the Bessie Price she had known,— a pale, pretty girl, too delicate for rough, hard work at the mill, pinched by privation, abused by a drunken mother and a brutal father. At last, when she could endure no more, she had taken a desperate, mad step, and left town,— and she did not go alone.

Mary had once seen a picture in a shop window, portraying the beautiful victim of a villain's heartless deceit returning in rags, in a raging snow-storm, and dying upon her door-step. It had made a deep impression on the girl, and she had imagined that poor Bessie Price might some day return like that.

Now Bessie had come back, but from what the younger girl had heard, she stood in no need of pity, of material help,— and spiritual help was something which Mary, in common with the other dwellers on Barren Street, knew little about. The dire need, the endless struggle for the commonest requirements to keep soul and body together, from the first that she could remember, had left little time or inclination for less material things. But the woman of Barren Street, and the majority of the others in the busy, poverty-ridden, little, mill town, had risen in their virtuous wrath at this

violation of their vague traditions, and denounced Bessie Price for her open sin.

Mary could not understand it. At sixteen, she was too immature mentally, too stunted morally by her environment and the handicap heredity had laid upon her, to comprehend the full significance of this girl's break from the conventional and moral ethics surrounding them, and the attitude of the other women toward her. She could only remember the pale, over-worked, under-fed, abused creature who had slunk from their sight two years before, and compare that mental picture with the one that had been conjured up before her. Bessie should have been starved, wretchedly unhappy, deeply repentant,—she wasn't any of the three! There must be something wrong with the world.

Supper at an end, the two men lumbered out into the storm, the grandmother dozed in her chair, and Mary helped her mother with the dishes, while Jennie put her baby to bed in the littered back room. When the slack work was done, the mother and her daughters gathered about the dilapidated stove, while the old woman slept on in her corner. Outside, the rain sluiced against the rattling casements, and the rising wind wailed and raged.

All at once there came a timid knock upon the door, and a shrunk little old woman peered curiously in. She had a slat-like, stoop-shouldered figure, and nervously bobbing head, crowned with a tight little knot of iron-grey hair. She, too, looked toil-worn beyond her time, but unlike the rest, her weazened face shone with soap and water, and her freshly-ironed calico wrapper rustled crisply under her heavy shawl as she moved.

"'Tis me," she announced. "Is himself gone?"

"Yes, just. Come in, Mrs. Donahue. I'm glad you

could find the time." Mrs. Tinney obeyed the laws of hospitality by sweeping a pile of dirty clothes off the nearest chair, then bent again over her work as if afraid of losing a moment.

"Shure, I didn't foind ut. I shtole ut! How are ye all, the night?"

"Oh, all right," replied Jennie, listlessly, jogging the limp little bundle she had lifted from the bed.

"Well," Mrs. Donahue leaned back in her chair, and folded her hands complacently in her starched lap, "who wud ye be thinkin' I saw the day? Ye'll niver guess,—Bessie Price!"

"We knowed she was back." Mrs. Tinney didn't look up, but Mary raised her head suddenly, and caught her sister's lack-lustre eyes fixed curiously on her.

"But have ye seen her?" went on their visitor.

"No, I ain't.—Jennie has, though."

"Ain't she the grand-lookin' gurl now,—an' that light-hearted an' bright! She gave me 'The top o' the marnin', Mrs. Donahue,' in that saucy, cute way av her, widout manin' anny har-rm, an' for the loife o' me, I cudn't help shmoillin' back, an' passin' the toime o' day. Ain't ut a pity that a gurl's got to be bad to be happy,—gurls that has to wor-rk for the wages ours does, anyways.—Shure, not but pwhat anny gurl wid her health an' strength, an' a knack wid her wor-rk, cudn't be happy wid a good, steady man loike me Ben," this with a quick glance at Mary, "but Bessie was always weak an' spindlin', as ye well remember, Mrs. Tinney, —though to look at her now, ye'd niver think ut! She's been to Boston, an' New York, an' Chicago,—"

"Yer didn't — *talk* ter her?" Mrs. Tinney looked up at last.

"I did that, an' roight in the middle av the shtreet av

a Satherday! I hov been a dacent woman all me loife, Mrs. Tinney, but I've known Bessie since she was bor-rrn, an' to tell ye the God's truth, ut did me hear-rt good to see her lookin' so well an' happy!"

"She'd ought ter be in her grave!" Mrs. Tinney retorted. "Such women as her ain't fit ter live! I'm surprised at yer, Mrs. Donahue! How would yer like Ben ter be seen speakin' ter her?"

"I wudn't be loikin' him to shtop an' talk, maybe," Mrs. Donahue admitted, "but I'd knock his head aff fer him, if he wudn't give her a dacent good-marnin' as he passed by. Thim women have hard toimes av ut, too, I'm thinkin'. It ain't for the likes o' us to make ut any harder fer thim. 'Ye're the first person since I've come back, to give me a good wor-rd, Mrs. Donahue,' says she to me, and the bright, brave, gay look av her sort o' faded fer a minute, leavin' her kind o' pitiful, 'exceptin' the shop people, an'—an' Gertie McQueen!' 'Gertie McQueen?' says I. 'Why, she's crippled! She's been abed since her hip was crushed in the machin'ry.' 'I know,' says Bessie, wid a happy, little laugh, 'but she won't be for long! I'm goin' to sind her down a wheel chair from Boston.—An' she won't ride anny the less aisy in ut, Mrs. Donahue, because it's paid fer wid money from me hands!' An' faix, there's truth in that, Mrs. Tinney! Whin ye think that Gertie McQueen wud be lyin' on her back for the rist av her loife, if Bessie Price hadn't gone to the divil, 'tis har-rd to understand the ways av Providence!"

Mrs. Tinney shrugged her thin shoulders.

"I guess it's easy fer such as her ter give."

Jennie sneered openly. Mrs. Donahue turned and looked at her with pointed disparagement, albeit her eyes twinkled.

"Well," she said, "I just thought I'd run in an' tell ye all Bessie'd come back, an' how nate, an' clane, an' sweet she looks, as nice a gurl to see as anny in this town, an' nicer th'n most!—I must be gettin' back now, an' tidy up me kitchen.— Will Ben be seeing you in the mornin', Mary?"

"I guess so," Mary's face reddened, and she bent lower over her work. Mrs. Donahue winked knowingly at Mrs. Tinney, and the door shut smartly after her energetic figure.

Jennie shifted her baby with unnecessary violence on her arm. A dull red spot glowed in each of her sallow cheeks, and her eyes were vixenish.

"Well, I never!" she snapped. "A nice kind o' woman she is,—an' at her time o' life, too! I'll bet she was a gay 'un when she was young!"

"Did you hear her, too, takin' a fling at the decent girls in this town, an' settin' that Price hussy up above 'em,—what's the matter with you, Mary Ann? You ain't opened your mouth! If you're worryin', 'bout them shoes —"

"Well, I ain't, Mother. I was just thinkin'."

"My Gawd! What 'bout?" Jennie exclaimed, derisively, but her face changed at her sister's reply.

"'Bout Bessie Price."

"That good-for-nothing —!" the mother turned on her furiously.

"She's worse'n that! Don't you let me ketch you speakin' to her, Mary Ann. She's a strumpet!"

"Does that matter so much?" Mary asked, quietly. "She's happy an' cared for,—she's got good clothes, an' enough to eat. She'd 'a' been dead if she'd 'a' stayed here."

"Mary Ann Tinney!" her mother's heavy, greasy face was red, and mottled with rage.

Jennie shrugged her shoulders, contemptuously.

"Oh, let her alone!" she said, fretfully. "She don't know what she's talkin' 'bout,— child like her!"

"Yes, I do,— I know somethin's, an' I been thinkin' out a lot for myself. What's Bessie Price care what a lot o' people like us say 'bout her? Wouldn't she rather live an' be happy an' cared for, than be beat an' starved an' worked to death? — Wouldn't anybody?"

"You're a little fool,— you don't know what you're sayin'!" Jennie said, rather uneasily. "Think what her end'll be!"

"It couldn't be no worse'n the end she'd 'a' had if she stayed here, an' worked to death,— an' no matter *whut* she comes to, she's been happy, fur a little while — Whut's Ma ever had? Starvin', an' bringin' us along, an' workin', an' her man gettin' drunk, an' beatin' her, all these here years. Gran'ma would 'a' had the same thing, on'y her man killed somebody, an' got sent to the Pen — fur the rest of his life! You thought I didn't know 'bout that, didn't you? — Dick's no good, an' he's goin' to be jest like Pa! And you, Jennie,— whut've you got? Married younger'n me to a feller that run away with another woman, an' left you with little Bill to raise! I guess you're glad you got rid of him so easy, but,— whut're you goin' to do?"

"Oh," Jennie sighed, and looked about, as if at a loss for words. After a pause she went on, sullenly: "Go back to the mills, I s'pose, like you an' Ma, soon's little Bill's old enough to leave with Gran'ma."

"He's plenty old enough, now!" snapped her

mother, viciously. "There's women workin' right side o' me with babies younger'n whut Bill is, an' they're earnin' full rates, an' takin' keer o' the babies, too. Whut good's the piece-work you do home? You don't want to go back to the mills, you're jest a lazy, good-for-nothing —"

"You're right!" the slattern turned on her mother savagely. "I don't want to go back to the mills! I don't! I don't! I'd ruther die'n take little Bill with me, like poor Lucy Thompson!"

"I been in the mills eight years, an' I ain't never had a cent of money I earned," Mary observed, quietly. "I don't care 'bout that, nor Pa beatin' me, an' breakin' my arm like he done that time, nor not havin' 'nough to eat, always. But I couldn't have the one thing I wanted,—the mills kep' me from it. I couldn't go to school!"

"You got more eddication than me," returned Jennie, still sullen and dogged. "Didn't yer go ter school three months once?"

"Yes, but I wanted to keep on, an' I couldn't! An' now it's pretty near too late! — An' whut have I got? To keep on workin' in the mills, an' marry Ben Donahue, or somebody else, an' have him break the law an' get sent up, like Gran'ma's man, or beat me an' drink up what little I make, like Pa,—or run off with another woman? An' bye-an-bye to get so I *don't care* that I never could get any more schoolin'! To stay dirty and shiftless, like you an' Ma,—(oh, you know it's true!) — an' to just drag out here till I die, workin' in the mills! If they'd only pay us enough to live decent an' clean, an' keep the young ones out until they'd got a little schoolin', an' *played a little*,—but they won't. They don't pay none of us enough to live on."

"You been listenin' to some cart-tail talk, you have!" Jennie remarked. "We heard all that a lot before, but it don't do no good, an' we just go on workin', till we drop."

"Bessie Price didn't!—I ain't been listenin' to no one talk, either. I tell you I been thinkin',—thinkin' a lot. They'd ought to pay folks who work as hard as we do, 'nough to live on. It ain't right! You can all turn up your nose at Bessie Price, but I don't blame her!"

"Well," said her mother, grimly, "you let me ketch one o' my girls goin' the way she's gone, an' I'll take the hide off'n her!"

"I guess you needn't to worry none," Jennie sneered. "I ain't one to get the neighbors talkin' 'bout me, an' nobody but that no-account Ben Donahue ever looked at Mary, or ever will."

The mother made no reply to this, but a sniff, and Mary, too, was silent, gazing into the red cracks of the stove with a faint, age-old smile, which sat oddly on her childish face.

The entrance of the two men, the son drunk as well as the father now, and both viciously quarrelsome, put an end to the aimless talk for that night. But long after the others slept, and the rain had ceased, while a dim, watery moon peered between the great chimney tops, and paled into the coming dawn, the girl, Mary Ann, lay on her miserable cot in the squalid, filthy litter of the little back room, and thought of the world beyond the slavery of the mills, of the great things to be done, and wondrous knowledge to be gained,—and of the girl Bessie Price, and then, vaguely, of the only way which an all-powerful civilisation had left open for such as she to attain her birthright.

CHAPTER II

On the streets a Sunday quiet brooded, and heaps of soaking refuse steamed in the sun, and augmented the various stench of saloons and tenement. But the quietude only reigned in the streets, which were empty, save where now and then a man lurched home from his night's debauch, or a shambling, ragged figure crawled, peering in doorways, and ash cans, and broken heaped-up boxes. Here and there a very little child crouched at the gutter's edge, or on a doorstep, clad in a single tattered nondescript garment, blinking up at the pale sunlight with blurred, diseased eyes.

Within the crowded, evil-smelling tenements, parents and children alike sat huddled together, bending over their piecework — the dole dealt out to them by the foreman, to exact from them the uttermost limit of production for their barely living wage.

In their cluttered kitchen, which looked uglier, dirtier, more sinister even than the night before, in the thin, straggling shaft of sunlight, Jennie Tinney sat bent over her work, sniveling as audibly as she dared, and watching her father out of the corners of her pale blue eyes, while her baby squirmed and roared in the grandmother's lax arms. Jennie's little playtime of motherhood was over. She must go to work.

Mary, too, was watching her father furtively, as he strode about, smoking his old, blackened, odorous pipe. He did not work on Sundays, not Joe Tinney! He took his leisure, like any other man of a family. His young-

est daughter was wondering when he would be going out, — she knew it was nearly time for his morning pint, and he was always more restless and irritable until he had had it. Her brother had already gone to lounge about with the other corner loafers, and to eye such women as were abroad, and she meant to slip out also, in spite of her mother's protests, as soon as her father had gone.

With the morning had come a resolve to settle once and for all the doubts which crowded her mind. She would go to see Bessie Price.

At last, with a scowling threat to Jennie, the lord of the ignoble household took himself off, and instantly, a change seemed to electrify the miserable little circle. Jennie flung down her work defiantly, and seized her yelling son from her grandmother. Mrs. Tinney dropped her hands in her lap, and relaxed with a sigh, only to raise her head in a moment and resume working feverishly, with a fearful glance at the just closed door. The baby's sharp wail quieted, and only his sighs of content broke the stillness.

Mary got up resolutely, and took her shapeless, worn jacket and bedraggled hat from their hook on the wall.

"Where yer goin'?" demanded her mother, sharply.

"Out!" Mary briefly replied.

"Yer do, an' yer know what yer'll get when yer father comes home! Here's all this work ter do yet.— Are yer crazy?"

"No, I ain't. I—I'm goin' over to Mrs. Donahue's. I want to see her for a minute." And in spite of her mother's vituperation and Jennie's complainings, she slipped out of the door, and walked quickly up the alley, but when she reached its end, she darted

around the corner, and off in quite another direction.

The decrepit, age-stained house in which Mrs. Price, the mother of the unregenerate Bessie, lived in a constantly maudlin state of seclusion, was well beyond the edge of the town, over the hill on which two of the mills were situated, and in a depression, some quarter of a mile back of them, which was littered with tin cans and ash heaps of burned garbage, and quite appropriately known as "Hog Hollow."

The noonday sun was hot, and the breeze which, untainted now by the factory smoke of week-days, blew over the brow of the hill, bore with it something of the insidious warmth and subtle promise of spring. Mary walked quickly, her eyes alight, a little patch of wild rose color on her smooth cheeks, and the breath coming in little gusts, from her half-parted scarlet lips. The brisk exercise had set her thin blood racing through her veins, and as she swung past the house of the general manager of the mills, with that free, lithe step of hers, a stocky, heavily-built young man, standing in one of the front windows, caught her eye, and nonchalantly waved a plump hand. She looked up, saw him, hesitated, and suddenly smiled radiantly. Then as he abruptly disappeared from the window, she quickened her pace, in a very panic lest he should follow her, and fairly fled over the brow of the hill. The young man was attired in a cheap suit of flashy clothes, with a flamboyant tie, and he held an opulent cigar, still encircled with its ostentatious band, between two pudgy fingers, on one of which an impressive jewel glistened as he waved. It was the salesman, Marcus Beeman.

When Mary had passed the mills, and turned sharply to the right toward Hog Hollow, she no longer feared to be overtaken, and slackened her pace. She still

breathed quickly, and for the first time a little timidity came over her. What was she about to do? How would this girl receive her, the gentle Bessie of so short a time ago? Would she be changed in some mysterious, awful way? How could she speak to her,—how to begin!

She had been walking slowly and more slowly, as her confusion and trepidation grew upon her, and she realized that if she stopped now, she would turn back inevitably, finally, to the wretched town, and the mills, and the want, and abuse, and hopeless slavery. She must go forward, she must know what the future might mean.

She resolutely threw back her shoulders, and settled into her long, free, swinging stride, and soon stood at the sagging door of the grey, dismal, little cottage.

Without allowing herself time to think again, she knocked, then shrank back, and in another moment a light foot sounded on the creaking boards, the door was flung open, and she stood face to face with Bessie Price.

The two girls looked at each other, as if from across a great space, then Mary smiled, faintly.

"Bessie!" she said, in a low, vibrant tone.

"Why, if it isn't Mary Tinney!" The girl's voice was full of pleased surprise; then she checked herself, and added, with a hard, surface cordiality, "Didn't know I was back, did you?"

"Yes, I seen you—from the mill. That's why I come."

"What for—to see me? Well, I'm mighty glad to see *you*, Mary Ann! Come on in the kitchen. Mother's in bed in the front room, but she's asleep now, and won't hear us."

Mary, following the older girl down the hall, eyed the slender figure ahead of her as if in a daze. The Bessie of the past had been pallidly pretty, with a listless voice, lifeless step, and a dull, meek way of shrinking into herself when she was approached, like a frightened, tortured mouse. She was now in reality only a very ordinary girl, with a cheap prettiness of face, and an easy-going, good-natured, breezy freshness of manner, but to Mary she was the most attractive, most mysterious creature in the world. Her cheap blue cloth gown, with its coarse lace trimming, the many silver bangles clanking on her left arm, the high French heels on the worn patent-leather house slippers, the stagy "Janice Meredith" curl behind one ear, dependent from an elaborate arrangement of hair which was far more abundant and more brilliantly golden, than two years before,—all presented a picture, the elegance of which made Mary catch her breath. And this wonderful creature had worked beside her at the mill!

When they were once seated in the kitchen, however, a strange constraint fell upon them both, and the silence grew more awkward with every moment, as Mary searched the chaos of her mind for an easy, natural beginning. Bessie Price's hesitation, however, came from no sense of embarrassment, but perplexity; and long unaccustomed to any effort at restraint, she made a short preamble and finally blurted out her thought.

"Gee, but you've grown, Mary — let's see, you're sixteen now. How're all the girls? — I saw some of them on the street yesterday, but — Say, did you know why I left town?"

Mary's confusion subsided, and she turned steady eyes on the other girl's nervously unquiet ones.

"Yes," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You

went away with Mr. Raynor, the buyer for that Boston department store."

"Didn't think you knew, or—or maybe you wouldn't have come." The hardened look of bravado had gone from Bessie Price's eyes, and they glanced everywhere but at the younger girl.

"Why?" Mary asked, simply.

"Oh, because,—because,—the people here all think I'm dirt under their feet, I suppose, but —"

"Well, I don't. You was just dyin' here, with the hard work, an' standin' all day, an' not enough to eat, an' comin' home to — this!" And she indicated the wretched home with an expressive gesture.

"So you understand, do you, Mary?" Her tone was eager. "I never thought of your taking it that way, but you always were a queer, quiet, little thing; different from the rest."

"So was you."

"Yes, I — I kept it all bottled up inside of me,—here!" She thumped her breast vehemently, and the bangles on her wrist jangled. "Long as I could I stood it, and then Cleve Raynor came along and took notice of me, and was kind to me,—the very first person in all this world who was good to me, who made me feel as if it mattered whether I lived or died! And when he wanted me to go, I followed him,—God! I'd have followed him to the end of the earth!"

She paused for a minute, and Mary sat with wide eyes eagerly fixed on her face, and waited.

"He showed me life meant something else besides starvings, and beatings, and slaving, and standing on your feet twelve hours a day, till they were so swollen the nails cut in the flesh, and the blood left tracks through your shoes! — He taught me life meant pretty

clothes, and good food, and comfort, and rest, and pleasure! He gave me a nice little home, too,—just a few cheap rooms, but it was Heaven to me! He had me taught how to speak properly, and how to read and write nicely, and even play a little on the piano. He used to bring me books, and I'd read them to please him, though I never cared much for them.

"After a while, when I learned how to dress, and do my hair, and talk so he wasn't ashamed of me, he used to take me 'round with his friends to all sorts of places—theatres, and restaurants, and the races—oh, it was such fun!—I went with him to New York on his business trips, and lots of times he took me to the seashore. Oh, I was happy!"

Bessie paused, then hurriedly continued, in a change of tone.

"I'm happy now. Another girl and I have a cute apartment together in Boston. She's a nice little thing, and we get on all right. Our two gentlemen friends are pals, and we all go 'round in a bunch, and it's jolly—" her voice trailed off as Mary sat forward on her chair.

"And Mr.—Mr. Raynor?" she asked.

Bessie shrugged her shoulders, and began turning her bangles round and round on her wrist as she spoke, with assumed sangfroid.

"Gone back to his wife."

"His wife!"

"I didn't know he had one—till afterwards. Seems they'd had a tiff, before he met me, and she went out West to her mother, and took their two little boys with her. After Cleve and I'd been together nearly a year she wanted to come back,—heard about me, I guess,—and Cleve thought he'd ought to, on account of the boys. So—he did."

"Oh, what did you do?"

"Nothing. He'd left me some money,— I took it, I had to,— and I stayed on in the rooms, and didn't go anywhere, and finally Maida came,— she was the sweetheart of one of Cleve's friends,— and made me go out,— and one night I met somebody else. . . . Well, I've lived in Chicago since, and New York, and pretty much over the East, and I've never been without a nice home and pretty clothes, and had heaps of good times. It's been better than the mill a thousand times, and I'd start to-morrow and live it all over again! But you, Mary,— you don't seem to have changed very much. What are you doing?"

"Still at the mill. Everything's just the same,— nothin' don't change for us."

"How's Ben?"

The easy tolerance of the other's tone stung Mary, and she replied quickly,

"Oh, he's 'round,— but there's another young man at the mill a good deal. He's one of the new salesmen for the company, and makes his headquarters mostly in New York, but I've seen a lot of him lately. He's real pleasant."

The older girl eyed her quizzically.

"You like him, do you?"

"Oh, yes — he's different from the men here at the mills."

"How — different?"

"Well, he's been everywhere, an' seen everything, an' he knows a lot more than anybody here, an' he's good-lookin', an' wears lovely clothes an' jewellery, an' he's so jolly, an' kind, an' pleasant, always sayin' nice things, an' showin' that he likes you —"

Mary's face was flushed again, her eyes bright, the

unheeding words came faster. She seemed to be speaking her thoughts, to be unmindful of the other girl's presence, until a good-natured laugh interrupted her.

"If they don't look out, they won't be keepin' you at the mill much longer, either, Mary! You won't be able to stand it any more than I could,—although you are stronger,—and there isn't any reason why you should. If you were fixed up a little you'd be real pretty. Why should you stay here and slave, and starve, when you could live like me just for the asking—What was that? Didn't you think you heard some one at the door?"

For an insistent thumping had sounded, and now as they listened, it came again. Some one was knocking at the back door, the kitchen door, near which they sat. Bessie Price jumped up and swung it back to disclose Ben Donahue standing on the doorstep, a covered basket on his arm.

"Well, Ben, how are you? It was real nice of you to come. I'm awfully glad to see you. I suppose your mother sent you?"

But Ben did not answer or seem to see her bright-clad figure, with its golden curls and jingling silver bangles. He was looking straight past her at the half-defiant, half-shrinking figure of Mary, and into his eyes there crept a look, not pleasant to see.

"You!" he cried.

"Yes, of course it's her."

Bessie took it upon herself to reply hastily, and it was well she did, for Mary was speechless with surprise and consternation. "She came up to ask how Mother was."

Ben did turn to her then, but his gaze went uncer-

tainly back to Mary's averted face, as if a vague suspicion had taken possession of him.

"Won't you sit down?" continued Bessie affably.

Ben doggedly shook his head, and set his heavy basket on the table with a thud.

"Mother, she sent me up with this to yer. Thought yer ma might like some fixin's. I gotter go back now down to the town, and Mary, she, she's gotter go long o' me."

"I—" began Mary, but the sharp-eyed Bessie stopped her with a gesture.

"Of course, she'll go back with you," she asserted cordially. "Don't every girl like to walk with her beau Sunday afternoons?—Now you run along," and she gave Mary a friendly little push, "and thank your mother for me, Ben, for the nice things in the basket. Tell her Ma ain't noways as sick as she pretends, but all the money I sent to repair and clean this house went for—something else. Now that she's laid up, I'm goin' to have the repairs done myself, and the house will be like new, and when she gets well, she'll have to start in with it good and clean, anyway.—Good-bye, Mary. Hope I'll see you again." And she closed the door after them with a cheery bang.

For a moment the two in the cinder path looked at each other, then Ben said, hoarsely.

"What were you doin' there, girl? Don't you know that's no place for you? Don't you know—don't you know she ain't a good woman?"

"I guess if she's good enough for your mother to speak to, she's good enough for me."

"That ain't it,—you don't understand. Ma's a woman—she's old enough to do what she wants to, but you—you're only a girl, Mary."

"A girl — like Bessie Price."

"No!" he cried, passionately. "Not like that — not like Bessie! Don't yer ever dast ter let me hear yer say that again! An' don't yer ever go there, neither. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear, an' I'll tell you right now, Ben Donahue, that when I want to go anywhere, or do anything in this world I'm goin' to do it! If Pa can't stop me, I don't guess you can. You're gettin' mighty fresh with what you will have, an' you won't have! I'd like to know what business you think it is of yours, anyway!"

"Why, Mary — why, girl! Ain't we knowed each other all our lives? Ain't we kep' company almost since yer started at the mill, when yer was a little bit o' a thing? Ain't yer goin'er be my — my wife?"

"I don't know." Mary turned and eyed him critically through narrowed lids, from top to toe. It was as though she really saw him for the first time,— the tall, ungainly figure in its shabby, ill-fitting clothes, the thin, sharp face, with the sallow, mill-pallor upon it, the shifting eyes and weak mouth and great, clumsy, trembling hands. The whole personality of the boy spelled inefficiency, and that alone, in the girl's desperately discontented frame of mind, was as fatal as physical repulsion would have been to a more delicately attuned sensibility. Live with this stupid plodding animal the rest of her life? — work with him, suffer for him, grow old and die beside him? Vaguely, she felt these questions crowding her brain, and although she could not have put them into words a wild feeling of revolt arose within her at the half-acknowledged thought.

"I don't know," she repeated. "Leastways, I ain't goin' to marry, yet. I'm goin' to be free to do as I

please! You ain't got no call to tell me what I shall or shan't do!"

"I know that," Ben said, humbly. "I know I ain't got no call yet ter tell yer what ter do, but I — I forgot. Seems like yer was married ter me already, sometimes."

"Well, I ain't!" Mary slackened her pace, with heightened color. They were nearing the house of the general manager, and Mary observed a familiar figure loitering expectantly about, and then, seeing her under male escort, dodge discreetly into the house.

Evidently, Ben had seen him, too, for the frown on his forehead deepened, and forgetting the warning he had just had, he plunged recklessly into an expression of the thought uppermost in his mind.

"And looky here, Mary, there's another thing, too, I want ter speak ter you about — that Marcus Beeman! Yer wouldn't listen ter me las' night, I seen yer talkin' ter him yesterday at the mill, and Sadie Gilman says her little brother Georgie took a note from him ter yer Thursday. He ain't no good, that feller, — wouldn't be hangin' 'round mill girls, if he was, 'stead o' leavin' them ter the fellers they're keepin' company with. Why doesn't he go off ter his own kind, I' like ter know, or 'tend ter his business! He's a regular bad egg!"

"You ain't got no call to talk so, Ben. What's he done to you? Mr. Beeman's a real nice man, and I like him."

"Oh, he is, is he? He's the sort of nice man Mr. Raynor was, — the one that Bessie Price took off with, — and now think o' her — a bad woman!"

"Yes, think of her now," Mary cut in, fiercely. "She don't stand on her feet twelve or fourteen hours a

day in the mill! She don't starve an' wear ragged clothes an' get beaten an' kicked by a drunken sot of a father! She don't —"

"Mary, Mary — what are yer sayin', girl? This comes o' yer goin' up there. Whatever possessed yer?"

Mary's vehemence died down as quickly as it had risen, and she walked on slowly, in deep thought, quite oblivious of the young man at her side. Ben unwisely re-opened the subject.

"But it's him,— that Beeman there, an' his kind, that makes all the trouble between girls and fellers like us, and he ain't goin' ter come foolin' 'round yer no more. I'll tell yer that! He'll keep away, or I'll —"

"Or you'll — whut?" Mary turned in the road and faced him, her face white with rage, her eyes like glinting yellow-green points of steel. "What will you do, Ben Donahue? Knock him down? He could lick three of you with one hand! Go to the manager and tell him his best salesman'd been talkin' to a girl, and had got to be discharged because you, one of the fourth grade mill hands, didn't like it?"

Mary's scorn cut like a lash, and the boy drew back and stood silently watching her, his hurt resentment rising with every word to an anger as white hot as her own.

"I'll talk to Mr. Beeman or anybody else whenever I want to, an' if you don't like it, Ben Donahue — well, I guess the mill's big enough, or the town's big enough, or the world, for us to keep from under each other's feet!"

"And that's yer last word, is it, Mary?"

"Yes! I won't have you or anybody else standin' over me."

Without another word he turned on his heel and left her, striking out across the low, marshy, refuse-littered flats in the direction of the sluggish river which skirted the town to the right. Mary glanced after him and shrugged her shoulders.

"Let him walk off his mad," she said to herself, "and keep away from me. Oh, I wish he would! I can't marry him and go on livin' here and workin' in the mill with not even a little rest to look forward to, or better times,—nothin' but gettin' old and dyin',—oh, I can't! I don't see how I ever thought I could."

She walked on slowly, so deeply engrossed in her thoughts that she didn't hear the rapid thud of heavy footsteps behind her in the soft mud of the road, until a hand was laid upon her arm, and a voice close to her ear said, meaningly:

"How'd you manage to work it, dearie? I thought you'd never get rid of that fellow."

Without any show of surprise, she turned and shook off the smug detaining hand.

"I didn't manage nothin', Mr. Beeman," she said coldly. "Ben — we had a fight, and I — I sent him on off."

"And I thought you did it on my account," he said with an injured air. "I thought you knew I was waiting for you and got rid of him so as you could be with me."

"I — oh, Mr. Beeman, why should I think you'd want to walk with me?"

"Think!" he echoed, with a sudden intensity, which made his voice husky. "Think! — Don't you know I want to, Mary? Can't you see when a fellow's crazy about you? I have been waiting ever since you went over the hill there, to meet you on the way back, and

then I saw you coming with that fellow — what's his name? Donahue, isn't it? Heard you were keeping company with him, too. You aren't, are you, Mary? You're not his girl?"

"No," said Mary, rejoicing in the emancipation the last half hour had brought her. "No, I ain't — his girl."

"That's good. I didn't believe it when they told me, but I'm glad to have you say so, yourself. I didn't see how it could be, a fine, handsome girl like you! It makes me sick, Mary, to think of you working on here in the mills, and marrying one of these cattle, and losing your looks, and your health and your youth, all for nothing. It's — it's rotten."

Mary looked quickly up at him from under her lids, but said nothing. Insensibly, they had turned their steps away from the road and in the opposite direction to that taken by the irate Ben, and were making a detour to the left, doubling back upon the way they had come, in a wide semicircle. They were now just back of the mill in a cluster of smaller out-buildings, deserted now, save for the tardy rounds of the watchman. There were piles of decaying lumber and rusty iron all about, and pools of stagnant water lay in the deeply rutted, slimy roads.

The long, low buildings and lofty chimneys were smoke-grimed and weather-stained, the closed, iron shutters in the windows staring down like the eyes of the dead. The sun had disappeared, and the breeze had quickened to a steady north wind, which moaned as it swirled about the smoke-stacks and tall chimneys, as though in a great forest.

"Let's sit down here a minute," Marcus Beeman continued, drawing her to a low pile of lumber which looked

dryer and cleaner than the rest. "I want to talk to you, and I won't have any other chance. I'm going away to-night, Mary."

The girl had seated herself, and now stared up at him limply as he stood before her.

"You're — goin' — away?" she echoed, dully.

"Yes — to-night. I'm not coming back to Milltown any more. The firm's going to send me out in a new territory — much better, with bigger money, and I'm going to make New York my headquarters in the future. Will you miss me a little, Mary? Will you be sorry?"

"Sorry! — Miss you! — Oh!" Mary covered her face with her hands. She was not crying — it meant nothing to her that this sleek, self-satisfied young man should go out of her life, but it was all that he represented in her eyes of which she was taking leave forever in that bitter moment, — the great world beyond the grimy town, education, and cultivation, and luxury, and power, and freedom. Through him she had obtained her first brief shadowy glimpse of them, her first and probably her last, for those of her world seldom came in touch, or save dimly, felt the desire for those things which her soul craved. She heard a quick exclamation, and suddenly two arms closed roughly, almost fiercely, about her.

"You're crying! Mary! God! little girl, you do care, don't you? I can't leave you here like this! Will you come away with me?"

The slender body in his arms suddenly grew rigid, then after a tense moment slowly relaxed, and she glanced up at him, her curious, long eyes shining with what Marcus Beeman thought were tears.

"Go away with you!" she whispered.

"Yes, now, to-night! Come with me to New York. I'm crazy about you, I tell you! I have been ever since I first saw you standing at your machine, and I couldn't forget you. You're different from any other girl I ever saw in my life, Mary, I can't leave you behind like this,—you mustn't waste your life here in these mills. You're not like the rest of them, you were born different somehow. You couldn't live much longer in this hole, you'd die!" His words were coming faster and faster, and Mary sat passively with his arms about her, her eyes upon the ground, the exquisite wildrose color quickening and fading in her cheeks. "I'll take you lots of places you never heard of, and give you everything you want. I make a good deal—six thousand dollars a year from the firm alone, besides commissions. Will you come, Mary? I—I ain't the marrying kind—at least, not yet, but maybe bye and bye—"

"Oh!" Mary stopped him with a gesture. "It isn't that—it's—oh, if I only dared!—But look at me," she turned to him with a pitiful little gesture. "Look at these clothes! How could I go anywhere with you?"

"Oh," he said, easily, "I could fix that. You leave it to me. Will you come with me, Mary,—will you? For God's sake, say you will, little girl! I can't do without you. Listen! I was to have taken the midnight train for New York. Instead of that, I'll have a rig ready at ten o'clock,—you slip out and meet me at the corner of Barren Street, you know, by the blacksmith's shop, and we'll drive over to the Junction, and take the eleven-train for Bridgebury. I'll bring along a waterproof coat for you that will cover you all up—it looks as though it was going to be a wet night, anyway,—and to-morrow we can get a whole new outfit in Bridgebury, and go on to New York. What do you

say, Mary? Will you come — will you? — I — I swear I'll be good to you! I'll make you happier than you ever thought of being in all your life."

"I don't know — I must think! How can I tell? You — you like me here, Mr. Beeman, because, maybe I'm a little different from the other girls at the mill, but —" she remembered Bessie Price's story — "but you'll be ashamed o' me when we get to New York among your friends."

"Ashamed of you, nothing!" he cried, with rough tenderness. "If you were dressed right, you'd be a raving little beauty. Not a fellow in the crowd's got a girl that could hold a candle to you, and you're smart enough to pick things up in no time. You will come, dear?"

"I don't know — oh, I don't know. I — I must go home, now." She rose rather unsteadily to her feet, and he put his arm again about her.

"I'll be waiting for you," he said, "remember, at ten o'clock, by the blacksmith's shop. You'll come to me, Mary. You must! I want you so!"

He crushed her to him suddenly and kissed her, then as quickly, his arms dropped from her, and he backed away a pace or two, his breath coming quicker, his eyes searching her face. Mary gasped and swayed a little, and one hand went to her throat, then she steadied herself and said quietly,

"I must go now. No, don't come. Please wait here until I get a little bit ahead. I must go alone."

"Yes, you're right. I'll give you five minutes' start before I go back to Wilcox's, but remember, Mary, to-night I'll be waiting."

CHAPTER III

THE light spring breeze came in at the open window in little gusts, and flapped the green paper shade smartly against the frame. The bright spring sunshine flooded the little room, and streamed over the flaring, sprawly wall-paper, and the thin, gaily flowered carpet. It played lightly over the pine bedroom furniture brave in a fresh coat of glistening blue paint,—over the wash stand, with its blue-banded bowl and pitcher, the dresser with its warped square of looking-glass, and the bed, with its rumpled coarse, blue coverlet. Heaped upon the bed, and on the floor on either side were boxes and packages of every size, overflowing with snowy tissue paper, where they had been opened and flung carelessly aside. Before the dresser stood a young girl, her slim corseted figure trimly encased in a neat well-fitting brown suit. She was twisting her tawny hair into a huge rippling coil, and fastening it with tortoise-shell pins and combs from a newly-opened package beside her. When she had finished, she gazed long into the little mottled glass, all distorted as it was, for its verdict.

Surely, surely that could never be she! The face which met her eyes was sharp-pointed and thin, the cheek-bones prominent, the mouth still childishly mobile. But there was a subtle change since the previous day, a metamorphosis greater than the neatly-arranged hair and dainty garments accounted for. The figure seemed not angular and thin, but delicately slender; there was

a soft clear rose flush in the cheeks, and the sallow complexion had taken on a golden tinge. The dull, brutishly-pained, dazed look of early morning had left her long eyes, and they lightened now with a soft radiance, a steady glow which grew deeper as she gazed at her reflection in the little mirror. It was not beauty which she saw — it was the dawning of that indefinable thing called charm, and, child as she still seemed, Mary recognized it and knew it for what it was, without being able to give it a name. She had awakened, and found herself.

From beneath the window came the intermittent whirring of a lawn-mower on the thin strip of grass between the hotel porch and sidewalks, and the monotonous whistle of the man who manipulated it. The laughter and chatter of the school children floated up, as they hurried past in gay little groups, and there was the rattle of a passing wagon or two, the heavy, straining creak of a loaded cart, and the hum of a distant trolley. It was all bright and pleasant and humdrum; quite as the beginning of any other lovely spring day in a little country town. Quite as if nothing momentous had happened; as if no event had occurred, no decisive irrevocable step been taken to change the course of her life from the rut of certain poverty and toil and squalor, to an unknown, unexplored path, which might lead to a depth of degradation yet unsounded, or to a broader, fuller existence which she could only dimly foresee, realizing that it lay there in the shadowy future, together with the perfect self-knowledge, and poise, and understanding, which would enable her to master all that for which her eager soul hungered.

The face which looked back at her from the warped glass gave no hint of the thoughts passing through her

mind,— it was as impassive as though a heavy hand had passed across it, wiping it as blank of all expression as her dormant heart was still bare of all emotion. Only her softly glowing eyes changed as their glance swept the unaccustomed daintiness of her attire and the soft outlines of the cloak, the simple hat and gloves which lay ready to her hand,— there was in her eyes no sparkling, girlish pleasure at the possession of such things as had never before been hers — rather was there a fierce joy, a savage delight of conquest.

She was possessor, more than possessed,— she was not as one who had yielded, had given herself into the hands of another, but rather as one who had fought an ancient enemy with the weapons it had forced upon her, and had wrested from it the spoils of a sordid victory.

Suddenly, with a little shudder, she threw off the lethargy which was fast encompassing her, and turning, took up the trim little brown hat and pinned it on her soft hair. As she stood, with arms upraised, the door behind her opened quietly. She did not hear it, nor was she aware of any one's presence until a gasp of sheer astonishment made her turn. A young man stood on the threshold — a stocky, heavily-built young man, with a good-natured, none too intelligent face,— the same young man who had stood in the window of the general manager's house, on that yesterday, a hundred years before. He was staring at her as if he could not believe the evidence of his own eyes and her cheeks flamed with sudden crimson at the involuntary, un concealed admiration in his face.

"By God!" he cried. "You're a queen — a little queen! I guess I wasn't a good judge! — I guess I didn't know what I was doing when I took you from the mill! Just wait till we get to New York and we'll

show 'em! Why, Mary, they can't any of 'em hold a candle to you!"

"I'm glad," she replied, simply. "I'm glad you won't have to be ashamed of me, Marcus. I don't think anybody need know you — you took me from the mill! Bye-and-bye, when I've learned something —"

"You don't need to know anything!" he interrupted rashly, intent on his own jubilant train of thought. "You've got them all beaten, just as you are! You —"

But she turned on him almost fiercely.

"You promised, Marcus Beeman! You promised me last night that I should learn!"

"Oh, the schooling! Yes, of course you shall! But you'll soon get enough of it, there'll be so much else to do. Just wait till the crowd sees you! Why, girl, you're a beauty, a regular beauty!"

Mary picked up her gloves and started to draw them on, outwardly unmoved by his frank praise, except for the tell-tale evidence of her flaming cheeks, and softly glowing eyes.

"I'm glad," she said again, quietly. Then she added, as he came toward her, "Ain't it nearly time for the train, Marcus?"

"Yes — Why, Mary, you haven't had your coffee!" He pointed to the table on which stood an untouched tray containing coffee and rolls.

She shook her head.

"I don't want any. I — couldn't."

"Well, you must! How're you goin' to travel if you don't eat anything? Here, take this."

She took the cup he brought her, and drank obediently.

"There's the girl. Now you'll feel all right —

You like the clothes I brought you this morning? It's the best you can do in this town, but just you wait!"

He put a large hand on her shoulder, and turned her about until she faced him. She did not draw back, or shrink at his touch, but raised her impassive face to his.

"Yes," she said, apathetically. "I like them. They're grand, Marcus."

"Then, that's all right!" he cried, cheerfully. "I guessed at the gloves and the shoes, but I think they'll fit well enough.—All ready now? The train leaves at nine."

He halted her suddenly on the threshold.

"Mary, you're not sorry, are you? You're not sorry you came?"

"Why, no, of course not, Marcus!" she opened wide eyes of surprise upon him. "I'm very glad."

"You won't ever be sorry, if I can help it," he said, huskily. "I love you, Mary-girl!"

New York! First the swift, unending rush of the train through the green countryside, with now and then a dash through a sleepy village or bustling little town, and at longer intervals a momentary halt at some wayside station, with its inevitable collection of females with bundles, small boys, dogs, and the general flotsam and jetsam of the average country town.

Oblivious alike to the attention of Marcus — who purchased magazines and candy with ostentatious lavishness from the train-boys — and to the curious regard of their fellow passengers, Mary sat through all the golden hours of that wonderful day with tense body and eager eyes fixed upon the ever changing panorama outside the car window. Marcus, aware of the attention which Mary unconsciously drew to herself in spite

of her utter ingenuousness of manner, was immensely flattered, and proud beyond expression.

As the long afternoon drew towards its close, and the sun outdistanced them in their swift race, the green of the fields and woods gave place to sections of paved and gas-lighted streets interposed between areas of vacant lots and mud clogged and newly-cut roads, with here and there a mushroom-like row of brick houses, or the smoke-belching cluster of chimneys and rows of lighted windows which marked a manufacturing plant. Then the lines of brick buildings became long and unbroken and rose higher and higher, the paved streets continuous and regular. Darkness came on with miraculous suddenness, and finally with a rush and a roar they pulled into the huge train-shed at their journey's end.

New York! The deafening roar of the elevated trains overhead, the jarring clang of the surface cars, the rumble of huge heavy-laden trucks and scrape and thud of horses' hoofs on the cobblestones and steel car rails, all the clamorous din of the great city at the close of a busy day, descended upon Mary's bewildered ears as they stood for a moment waiting for the starter to assign them to a hansom. The only continuous noise to which she had become accustomed was the regular hum of the machinery of the mill, and this mighty multiplied dissonance made her tremble. Half unconsciously, she slipped her hand under Marcus's arm. It was the first familiarity she had vouchsafed him of her own volition, and he squeezed the little hand tightly against his rough coat in fatuous pride of possession. Then followed the short swift ride through a maze of daz- zlingly lighted streets to their final destination.

Marcus had discreetly chosen a small downtown com-

mercial hotel, but to Mary it was palatial, a veritable dream of magnificence. She held her breath as they shot upward in the mirror-lined elevator and followed the impressively brass-buttoned hall-boy to the suite which had been assigned them. Marcus bore himself with the easy nonchalance of one long accustomed to such splendor and Mary eyed him with respectful awe, as he tramped about the rather dingy little parlor and gave his orders to the bell-boy in no uncertain tones. He was used to all this,— he had lived always in just such surroundings, the glamour of it all was a mere every-day matter to him,— and he had condescended to notice her, to admire her, to take her from the deadly grind of toil and poverty at the mill, and bring her to share these marvels with him! She felt as if she must be dreaming, as if she would wake presently, and find herself on her dingy cot in the fetid atmosphere of that little back bedroom, with the odor of stale cabbage and frying pork pervading the air, and the fretful wails of Jennie's wretched baby in her ears. The insistent clanging bells of the cable cars in the street below broke in upon her thoughts with seeming reality, and her eyes wandered about the room and wonderingly noted the impressive grandeur of the marble-topped centre table, the rather faded red plush furniture and heavy curtains. Through the doorway she caught a glimpse of a snowy-covered brass bed and beyond a tiled bathroom, shining with nickle and porcelain. Her gaze came back to Marcus Beeman, and she saw that he was smiling at her amusedly.

"Well, girly,— like it?" he asked. "I got a suite instead of just a room an' bath because we'll have to stay here a few days anyway, till we can find a furnished flat, an' we'll have comp'ny,— the crowd'll want

to come 'round an' meet you. Don't forget we're using the name Bauman here,— Mr. and Mrs. Bauman. I'll put the fellows wise to it to-morrow."

Mary shivered a little; she could not have told why. Bauman! A name that was neither his nor hers! Of course, she was not entitled to share his name, but somehow the thought of an alias had not occurred to her. He was hiding,— skulking, too! And why? She had always thought men could live as they pleased, do what they liked, openly, with nothing to be ashamed of. She could not understand, but she felt suddenly cold, not with apprehension, but with a first vague forlorn sense of being cast out. Her childish mind could not grasp the fact that through the unconscious lips of the man to whom she had given herself had issued the first edict of an inexorable society,— that the unalterable law would some day demand its toll of her, for daring to save herself from the slow death from toil and privation to which it had been indifferent, by defying its first mandate. Even he — Marcus — recognized and respected this law of public opinion, and although he disobeyed, did not openly defy.

Something of what her mind was groping for must have shown itself in her tense face, for Marcus after a pause, repeated somewhat uncomfortably:

"We'll get a flat, a furnished one, soon as we can look 'round,— you'll like it better than living like this, won't you, girl?"

"A flat?" Mary roused herself with an effort. "Keep house, you mean, Marcus? Oh, that'll be lovely!"

"Yep!" he said, cheerily. "A regular home. We'll live just like — like real folks! Mabel'll help us find one. She'll know just what we want."

"Mabel?"

"Joe Gattle's wife. He's a friend of mine, a bookmaker, and Mabel's a fine woman, you'll like her. I'll get hold of 'em to-morrow."

Mary didn't know in the least what a bookmaker was, but she did not stop to inquire then. Another thought was uppermost in her mind,—the lesson of a few moments before had sunk deep.

"But she's his wife, you said, Marcus. What'll she think when she knows about—us? Maybe she won't—"

Marcus Beeman burst into a roar of laughter.

"Good Lord, what a kid you are! It don't make any difference to her whether you're a man's sweetheart or his wife, so long as you're a good feller,—she's a regular sport! She's a fine dresser, too, Mabel is. She'll show you how to do your hair, and tell you where to go for your clothes and things. And you can go the limit, Mary,—I had a good season this year and I want you to have the best. I'm proud of you, I want you to show 'em all what a little queen I've got!"

He came to her and taking her somewhat clumsily in his arms, he kissed her. Then he released her and putting his great hand under her chin he raised her passive face until he could look into her inscrutable, unchildlike eyes.

"Mary!" he said, hoarsely. "Mary, I'm just crazy about you! I don't know what it is, but you drive a fellow mad!"

She smiled gently at him,—a rather wan little smile, and all at once he saw the strained lines about her mouth and the dark shadows of fatigue under her eyes.

"Poor little girl!" he spoke in a low gentle voice she had never heard from him before. "All tired out,

aren't you! Tell you what we'll do,— we'll have a little bottle of wine sent up right now! You never had any champagne, did you, Mary?"

She shook her head.

"No. I don't think I'd like it. We'd better not, Marcus —"

"Nonsense! It'll liven you up, an' make you feel fine! You'll get used to it, travellin' with the wine crowd I know! I'm goin' to show you some of the town to-night. We'll go to a restaurant for dinner, and to the theatre, and around to Jack's afterwards. Maybe we'll see some of the crowd."

The events of that first night in New York were never clear in Mary's mind afterward. Too many new impressions had been crowded into the space of a few hours for her to retain anything in her memory of it but a confused blur of lights and sounds, strains of music, hurrying throngs of people, obsequious black-coated waiters, bejewelled women in gorgeous evening gowns, and everywhere a sea of faces—weary and painted; young and fresh and joyous; cynical, bored, tolerantly amused, intent, aflame with passions of anger, and hate, and love, and lust,—they floated around her on the heavily scented air in a haze of unreality, and she could only gaze, and close her eyes, then gaze again.

Marcus ate and drank with the satisfied air of one thoroughly content and at peace with the world. He was a shrewd young man, was Marcus Beeman, in spite of his stolid, rather fatuous face. His years of experience as a salesman had made him a quick, sure judge of character, and he knew thoroughly the little world he frequented. Also,—an inheritance of his race, perhaps,—he had a sense and appreciation of the

artistic, wholly untrained, but intuitively unerring. He had, half unconsciously, seen and recognized the possibilities in the pale, slender little girl of the mill, with her gorgeous hair and strange eyes, even while his pulses leaped under the sway of her uncomprehensible charm. He knew now that he had made no mistake. No one could be less self-conscious, more naïvely unaware of notice or comment than she, yet men turned in their chairs to look after the quiet little figure in the simple brown gown as she preceded Marcus to their table,—world-satiated men, who would not have raised their eyes for a second glance at the most noted or notorious woman of the day.

“Gad, did you see those eyes!” Marcus heard one man exclaim to his companion. “Whose eyes,—little girl in brown?” the latter asked, and Marcus lingered a minute to hear the reply. “Yes. She’s only a child, but she’s going to be a beauty! I never saw such eyes in a woman’s face!”

The champagne had dispelled her fatigue and brought an exquisite flush to her clear skin and a sparkle which seemed to darken her eyes and deepen their glowing depths. She scarcely touched the dinner which Marcus had ordered with infinite care, but drank in all that went on about her with quickened breath and eager, parted lips.

Marcus watched her with slightly bewildered admiration. He had known many women,—the coarsely pretty, fun-loving, free-and-easy women of his class,—but never before had he come in contact with a character at once so simple and so complex, innocent and yet worldly-wise. He could not understand her,—he felt vaguely uncomfortable when her calm, steady gaze was fixed upon him, but the very incomprehensibility

of her fascinated him, and the thought that she belonged to him, had given herself into his hands, intoxicated him like new wine.

After the dinner, he took her to a music hall, then to supper, and throughout the long evening Mary watched silent and entranced, the quickly changing scenes about her. She could find no words nor the need of them, and Marcus wisely left her to assimilate by herself what she could of the new impressions crowding in upon her.

At last, however, when they were rattling hotelwards in a hansom, he turned and looked down at her small face.

"Well, Mary girl," he asked, "how did you like it? — What do you think of it all?"

There was silence for a minute, and then as if in mute reply her head swayed against his shoulder and rested there, and with a strange tenderness which he had never known before tugging at his heart, he put his arm gently around her and held her so. The sudden, vital change which had come into her life, the long journey, the exciting events and many and varied sensations of the day had exhausted her, and she had sunk into sleep suddenly, deeply, like a little child.

CHAPTER IV

ON the morning following their arrival in New York, Mary had asked Marcus rather timidly if she might send for the hotel hairdresser and manicure whose card was tacked up in the bathroom. He assented with alacrity, and went out to look up his friends, while Mary spent a well-employed morning in the hands of the expert, who sighed over the ill-kept, toil-deformed hands, but went into ecstasies as the radiant hair fell pliantly through her deft fingers. Mary watched every move intently, asking innumerable questions meanwhile, and the Frenchwoman, pleased by her eager, naïve interest, replied indulgently, explaining her processes as she went along. Mary had commenced to learn.

When Marcus returned at noon, he found her sitting by the window, with one of the illustrated periodicals he had purchased for her on the train, spread out upon her knee. Her hands were softened and the glistening nails had a semblance of shape, while the mass of sunny hair was piled high in soft, burnished undulations on her small shapely head. He whistled softly.

"Gee, don't we look grand!" he exclaimed, throwing wide the door. "Come in, Mabel!"

A stout, middle-aged woman entered, followed by an equally stout, florid gentleman, who sported a large black moustache. The woman's elaborately arranged hair was obviously blondined, rouge and powder stood out frankly upon her wide good-natured face and the lingerie gown which encased her firmly corseted figure

bore evidences of having been worn more than once, but Mary took no note of such details as she rose hurriedly in an agony of shyness. The lady came to her, holding out both pudgy hands in their all but bursting gloves, and her beaming face was wreathed in the broadest of smiles.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, without waiting for Marcus' introduction. "Don't mind our runnin' in like this! Markie said you didn't know a soul in New York, an' I made him bring us right along to meet you!"

"It's Mrs. Gattle, that I told you about, Mary," Marcus explained; "and this is Joe."

Mary shook hands, a shy little smile on her flushed face. Mr. Gattle cleared his throat loudly, started to speak, thought better of it, and stood twirling his moustache and eyeing the young girl with solemn approval. Mrs. Gattle went to the mirror over the mantel, opened her gold mesh bag, drew from it a square of chamois, and proceeded blandly to powder her nose, with immense satisfaction.

"Now we'll all have a cocktail," announced Marcus, "and then we'll go and get lunch.— Mabel's goin' to help us look for a flat, Mary, just's I told you she would."

"Yes, I guess I know one that'll just suit you, too, up in Thirty-seventh Street. We'll all go look at it right after lunch."

"It's real good of you," said Mary, hesitatingly, finding her voice at last. "Marcus said you'd be sure to know just what we — we wanted."

"Well, it's small," Mrs. Gattle remarked, "but you'll be so busy runnin' 'round town seein' things, you won't want to be bothered much with housekeepin', will she,

Joe? — Lord, I'd like to be comin' to New York again for the first time!"

"I'm glad we ain't!" remarked Joe, in a genial rumble. "She kept me on the jump for about six months," he added, turning to Marcus. "Wanted to find out everything, an' go everywhere at once,—wish you could've seen her! That was nearly twenty years ago but this was a real town even then."

"Yes," Mrs. Gattle chimed in. "I've put on some flesh since, an' learned a few things, but I like N' York just as much as the first day I saw it.— An' so will you!" She rested a plump jewelled hand lightly on Mary's shoulder. "After we see the flat you an' me'll go get you some clothes,—Markie says you only brought a bag with you. We're goin' to have a party to-night."

The flat was small,—four tiny box-like rooms, not over-light and stuffy with cheap, garish upholstery, but to Mary's untrained eyes it was a dream of luxury. A sharp-featured lady in a dingy kimono showed them through, and seemed anxious to sublet, and Marcus took it on the spot, for six months. Then he and Joe adjourned to some mysterious place they designated as "The Kids'," leaving Mary to the tender mercies of the buxom and energetic Mabel, who piloted her indefatigably from shop to shop and purchased wonderful gowns, and hats, and short-vamp, high-heeled shoes with a recklessness which took the girl's breath away.

"You needn't worry!" the lady remarked, with a shrewd twinkle in her little, good-natured eyes. "Markie's good for it. The more you cost a man, the more he thinks of you, remember that! Why, a friend of mine, not half as pretty as you, come on from Chi-

cago with nothin' but a suit-case, an' before she'd been here three weeks, she had a *gold* bag bigger than mine!"

Mary marvelled, but made no reply. The complexities of this new life into which she had plunged were heaping up about her, and she found no words in which to frame her desire for more comprehensive explanations of some of their phrases. She could only stow them carefully away in her mind until such time as enlightenment should come.

Their shopping tour, which left Mary spent and fagged, did not diminish the vivacity of the plump Mrs. Gattle, and five o'clock found them seated at a marble-topped table in a huge glittering café, in company with Joe and Marcus — who had met them by appointment in the entrance hall — and three strange men, whose names Mary had not caught when they were introduced, but whom Joe addressed variously as "Max," "Jimmie," and "Kid."

"How about the party to-night?" asked Mabel Gattle, fishing with two gloved fingers for the cherry in the bottom of her glass.

"Fine!" Marcus said. "Here, girlie, take another straw, that one's on the bum,— we got a private room upstairs, the corner one. I've fixed the dinner up with Borgo, and we'll have some coons in to play afterwards. The whole crowd'll be here."

"Then," announced Mabel, gathering up her gold bag and the cluster of jingling toilet accessories which dangled with blatant frankness from its chain. "I'm goin' to amble right over to Hempler's an' get my hair done.— You get yours fixed over again by the woman in your hotel, dearie," she added, to Mary. "That

blue chiffong model we got to-day'll be there for you, an' the slippers. Joe an' me'll stop by for you an' Markie."

Mary understood dimly that her new friend was kindly anxious for her to make the right impression on the rest of "the crowd," and wanted to pass judgment on her appearance before she ventured among them, and she nodded gratefully.

After Mabel's departure, the men drifted into a conversation wholly inexplicable to Mary's ears, and she sat watching the scene about her with wide eyes. It was a curious cosmopolitan gathering,—at a table nearby three earnest-looking men sat, their drinks scarcely touched, their heads close together in serious confab, and snatches of phrases wholly foreign to her understanding came to Mary's ears; — "Gates crowd," "a merger," "ticklish market," and something about "selling short." Then her attention wandered to the next table, where a statuesque queenly-looking woman gazed languidly about in frank boredom, while a lanky youth with flushed, beardless face and too bright eyes leaned far over the table and tried to take her elusive, gloved hand in his. Across the aisle two Frenchmen chattered and gesticulated with vehement intensity, and in a corner three stolid Germans sat in silent content over their tall demi-litres of beer. Over on the red velvet seat which lined the mirrored wall, a young girl laughed suddenly, hysterically, and the older woman beside her put her hand over hers to quiet her and turning seemed to speak indignantly to one of the two men at their table, who was watching the girl with quizzical, amused eyes.

It was all so novel, so strange and unreal, that Mary was completely lost to her immediate surroundings, and

awoke with a start to the fact that one of Marcus' friends,— the tall, thin man with the pasty skin, whom they called "Max," was addressing her.

"Markie says you're new to New York," he said, with a slight leer. "How d'you like it?"

"Oh, I — I don't know!" she replied a trifle breathlessly. "It's — it's awfully big, isn't it?"

Max guffawed.

"Big? You bet it's big!" He turned to the others. "But it ain't big enough to hold some of us, now an' then, is it?"

Marcus got up suddenly.

"We gotter get back to the hotel," he said. Mary rose thankfully. For some unexplainable reason she disliked Max. "See you fellers to-night."

The party was a glittering success, and Mary's advent into "the crowd" was accomplished with flying colors. By sheer accident Mabel had chosen for her a gown the dull blue tone of which brought out in wonderful relief the red-gold of her hair. An agony of inward shyness made her hold herself with an unbending dignity of manner which passed as poise in the riotous free-and-easy gathering. The women — two or three were mere girls, like Mary — were carelessly cordial in their camaraderie; the men gathered about a new pretty face like bees about a flower. Marcus was unctuously proud and happy, and Mabel as genuinely affectionate and intimate as if she had known her all her life. To her Mary clung as to an anchor, and Joe Gattle, resplendent in a broad expanse of white shirt-front and dazzling diamond stud, cleared his throat and beamed jovially around the table. Disjointed snatches of the conversation going on about her fell bewilderingly on Mary's ears.

"I tell you, that race was fixed, Ganymede was pulled! Trailer'd ha' been ruled off for it, only —"

"Pulled, nothin'! Trailer's a square boy, an' besides Cox wouldn't 'a' stood for it —"

"Get a flash at Hattie's bracelet! — Say, Hattie, where'd you get all that ice? Mayer must 'a' made a killin'."

A sparkling little brunette across the table, who wore a bracelet of huge diamonds on a painfully self-conscious wrist, laughed and nodded.

"Yes," she responded, "N' Orleans. I'm wearin' it now while I can,—you know Mayer's luck at Sheeps-head!"

A general roar greeted this sally, directed at the shining bald head of a corpulent gentleman at the other end of the table, who grinned sheepishly in reply. Nearby, two girls were talking confidentially, ignoring the man who sat vacant-eyed between them. Their voice carried above the babble going on about them.

"I lent her fifty, but I don't see how she can be so down and out. Clem used to give her a thousand a month and the Victoria —"

"Yes, but he expected her to entertain all his friends — her wine bills were frightful,—and keep up that house too. I heard she only had sixty dollars when he left her."

"But all those diamonds he gave her —"

"He didn't. He'd let her wear 'em, and lock 'em up in the safe when they got home. He took 'em all with him when he went away."

Mary touched Mabel Gattle's arm.

"Who is that tall, red-haired girl in the black dress, — the one with the violets?" she asked.

"That's Florrie — Florrie Hendricks," Mabel said,

hurriedly, in an undertone. "She used to be Kelly's girl,— Frank Kelly, the trainer for Kyle, the millionaire. He's got one of the biggest racing stables in America.— You'll see Kelly down at the track when the season opens, he's a fine feller. He gave Joe some good tips on the quiet last year."

Mary eyed the girl in black thoughtfully.

"She isn't his — girl, now?" she asked.

"No. Got stuck on Babe Doremus, the jockey, and ran off with him. Then he left her, and now — Lord knows!" Mabel shrugged her shoulders, and went contentedly on with her dinner. Mary was aware of a sudden, sickening sensation of fright, of actual panic. These people were well-dressed, happy, seemingly care-free. Yet they daily, hourly lived through tragedies, which sordid as her life had been, had come but rarely to her knowledge. In the poverty-stricken, toil-ridden monotonous round of existence of the mill-worker it had been a nine-days' wonder when Jennie's husband left her, and Lucy Thompson drowned herself and her unwelcome baby, and Bessie Price ran away with Mr. Raynor,— these events had been food for gossip in kitchens and barrooms and in hurriedly snatched breathing spells at the mills, for months afterwards. But here, in this astonishing world in which she found herself so suddenly launched, they seemed the merest, most casual of every-day occurrences.

The long dinner drew to a close, and was miraculously cleared away. A group of negro musicians appeared at the other end of the room and struck up a tuneful ragtime air, and almost in an instant, it seemed to Mary that every one was dancing. More people drifted in, and Marcus, who appeared to be the host of the occasion, was everywhere at once, dancing, order-

ing more champagne, greeting the newcomers and rushing to her side at every interval with whispered admiration and endearments which grew more heatedly amorous as the hours passed. Mabel, herself too "fleshy" to dance with any degree of comfort, and divining that Mary did not know how, kept the girl by her side, and they were surrounded by an everchanging group of men, eager to greet a new face, quick to fall under the spell of the unwonted charm of "Markie's girl."

The popping of champagne corks became more frequent, the air grew stale with the mingled odors of wine, cigarettes and wilting flowers, the voices waxed louder, the laughter high-pitched, the dancing more boisterous, and the lovemaking more recklessly ardent until finally a steely grey light came creeping in under the heavy velvet curtains at the long windows.

"Heavens, it's morning!" exclaimed Mabel, yawning frankly, with one gloved hand raised to her capacious mouth. "I'll be a wreck all day but this certainly was a grand party, all right. How you kept awake, though, I don't see, dearie,—not dancin', an' drinkin' no wine to speak of."

Mary turned to her, eyes dark and bright with excitement and wonder.

"Keep awake!" she echoed. "I don't believe I am awake! Oh,—why,—I never saw nothin' like this in my life! It's grand!"

Mabel laughed good-naturedly.

"My, but you're green! Wait'll you've been to as many's I have, an' you'll be glad enough to take off your corsets an' slip on a wrapper, an' sit around home!— But you'll keep on goin' to 'em, though, jus's I do. It's life."

Mary pondered this philosophy as, the party finally

broken up, she and Marcus drove back to their hotel through the awakening streets. Marcus was mellowly affectionate and tearfully anxious to know if the evening's entertainment had pleased her, and although Mary's replies were somewhat disjointed, owing less to weariness of body than to the chaotic state of her impressions, the sincerity of her enjoyment was unmistakable, and Marcus became mildly hilarious under the glow of her enthusiasm, and insisted on another bottle of champagne when they reached the hotel "to top off the evening." Mary acquiesced indifferently, with no comment,—her experience with her father had left drunkenness no terrors for her, nor even a sensation of disgust.

It was a condition which she accepted unquestionably, as a matter of course. She gave it no further thought, and was consequently amazed beyond measure when the next morning Marcus, pale and shaky and holding his aching head, mumbled a shamefaced acknowledgment of his over-indulgence. She was wise enough, however, not to voice her surprise, and her silence,—which he interpreted as hurt forbearance—touched him, and made him more contrite than any amount of recrimination which he had evidently expected, could have done.

That afternoon they moved from the hotel to the little flat, and the new life began in earnest for Mary. A reliable colored maid, procured by Mabel, left her free from even the small cares of her housekeeping arrangements, and the days were all too short, the hours too quickly passing for her active mind, avidly reaching out for knowledge of every sort which came her way, grasping every impression and making it her own.

True to his promise, Marcus found a tutor for her,

an old Frenchman who had once been a school-teacher, but who had deteriorated into a peripatetic canvasser of books and small mechanical contrivances. He was a weak-kneed, shambling, watery-eyed old creature, with soiled linen, a perpetual odor of cheap whiskey, and a racking cough, but to Mary he was a wizard who could unlock for her the doors leading to the realms of knowledge she craved.

He came to her with varying regularity, and she quickly mastered enough arithmetic for her simple accounts, and learned to write a fluent hand and to read and spell with ease. It was when the instructor produced a battered volume of history, however, that she reached the zenith of her content, and she sat for hours, ignoring the bustle of the great, yet unknown city without, and the sociable importunities of Mabel, her soul lost in the magic, undimmed glories of the past.

The old man's interest increased with hers, and in frequent garrulous moments he would share with her what memories remained in his sodden brain of his own beloved France. Finally she prevailed upon him to teach her what he remembered of his native tongue, and though the words came haltingly at first, from long disuse, forgotten phrases returned to him, and the eager facility with which Mary learned delighted him, and fired his fitful enthusiasm.

As the weeks passed Marcus was frequently away for days at a time on business trips, and Mabel, who had conceived a genuine, warm-hearted fondness for the girl, would pilot her about faithfully. The other women in Marcus' "crowd" were cordial but not over-friendly. Between them and Mary existed the same gulf, the same tacitly acknowledged difference as between her and the girls who had worked by her side in

the mill. They could not understand her, and for some unaccountable reason they felt vaguely uncomfortable in her presence. Mabel Gattle understood her no more than the rest, but her big comfortable heart warmed to the girl's virginal mind, and lack of knowledge of the world, and unconsciously she taught her much of her experience-born philosophy, softening its inexorability by her broad charity. From her, too, Mary learned more practical things,—how to make and keep herself well groomed and up to the moment, and what shops and manicure parlors to patronize, and through her, she became the habitue of the cafés and restaurants frequented by her particular coterie.

At first, Mary, proud of her increasing progress toward an education, would exhibit her newly-gained knowledge with naïve pleasure to Marcus on his return from a trip, but beyond praise for her constantly improving appearance, he had only amused tolerance for her desire to learn, and perceiving his lack of enthusiasm or understanding, she withdrew into herself, and made no further attempt to interest him in her efforts.

Her life with Marcus was not proving to be as simple as it had seemed at first. He was a healthy animal with a passion for making money, an easy-going willingness to spend it, and a good-natured desire to see everybody happy around him. He had no ideas beyond a successful business deal, and what to him constituted a resultant "good time." His moral standard was by no means on an exalted plane, but as far as his limited analytical powers went, he was honest with himself. In the rare moments when the thought of Mary, and his responsibility toward her, brought with it a tinge of uneasiness, he contrasted the comfort and ease with which he had surrounded her, with the misery and

heart-breaking toil and poverty from which he had taken her, and the undeniable change for the better in her material welfare reassuring him, his thoughts drifted to less complex things. Mary accepted gratefully everything he did for her, asked for nothing, and made no complaint, and he was content.

But as the weeks went by, and Mary's active mind developed like an opening flower, she perceived more and more clearly that between Marcus and herself there was not one bond of common interest, that underneath the frank camaraderie of their intercourse they were as far apart as the poles, as much strangers to each other as on the day they met. And, partly by intention, partly from the lessons taught her by Mabel Gattle's ruthless philosophy, she realized that when she ceased to attract him by her sheer physical presence, there would be nothing left to keep them together,—no deeper, surer passion existed between them than his momentary desire for and pride in the possession of her, and that when habit had dulled the edge of his passion, there would be nothing more lasting wherewith to hold him.

Meanwhile the spring was passing and summer fast approaching. The races were on at Sheepshead Bay, and thither Mabel took Mary with assiduous regularity. The elder woman's mind was a social register of the sporting world and she had a marvellous memory for faces, and Mary soon recognized on sight all the more prominent of the devotees of turf and track.

Marcus was in St. Louis, on a rather more extensive trip than usual, and would not be at home for ten days or more. In the warm, languorous days of late spring, Mary liked to be out in the open air, away from the

incessant din and uproar of the city, and the crowds and bright-colored costumes interested and diverted her, so that nearly every pleasant afternoon found her beside Mabel in the grandstand or down in the paddock or betting ring.

One sunny afternoon, Mabel had just settled back comfortably in her chair after the second race,—the favorite had come in fourth and she was already mentally spending the windfall which Joe would inevitably place in her hands unless he was hard hit during the remaining races of the afternoon—when Mary leaned forward eagerly, and grasped her arm.

“Who is that man down there, Mabel?” she asked, pointing to the promenade below them. “That tall, grey-haired man, with the thin face, and the grey moustache,—there in the Norfolk jacket, with the field-glasses slung over his shoulder?”

“My dear,” Mabel spoke impressively, “that’s Kyle, James T. Kyle, the millionaire! He owns one of the biggest stables in the country.—Remember Florrie Hendricks, at Markie’s first party? She was Kelly’s girl, you know, Kyle’s trainer,—well, that’s Kelly now, talkin’ to Kyle.—See him?”

Mary looked for the first time, then, at the other man. She saw an equally tall, lanky individual, his lean, smooth-shaven face tanned as with much life in the outdoors, his well-fitting inconspicuous clothes worn with a careless unconcern which Marcus could never have accomplished. He was talking rapidly, with quick, nervous gestures of his long arms; then he turned suddenly, and walked away in the direction of the paddock. But as he turned, his eyes swept the boxes of the grandstand with one quick searching glance, and it

seemed to Mary that for the briefest fraction of a second his eyes had rested on hers,—had seemed to hold them. Then he was gone.

She turned again to the track, and by the finish of the next race the incident had passed completely from her mind, when she felt herself under the scrutiny of a third pair of eyes,—and this time a prolonged one. It made her vaguely uneasy, and after combatting unsuccessfully the natural instinct to meet the gaze which seemed to burn into her inner consciousness, she turned her head and looked unexpectedly straight into a pair of keen, cool grey eyes which seemed to regard her with the impersonal curiosity of a mere bystander, but which she felt to be analyzing her, dissecting her as a scientist anatomizes a new specimen. The eyes left her for a moment, travelled in quick appraising scrutiny over her commonplace companion, then returned to hers, and now there seemed to be an interest in their glance, deeper than mere curiosity, the interest of one unexpectedly confronted by a problem.

Mary stared straight ahead of her, uncomfortable and slightly irritated, but when she felt that the man had at last turned away, she looked after his departing figure with eager interest. He was young, scarcely more than thirty, and bore the indescribable mark of breeding which she had begun to recognize and to distinguish from its swaggering imitations. Beyond the fact that he was also smooth-shaven, with a square, firm chin and bore the broad red weal of a scar across one cheek-bone, she could recall nothing of his appearance from her first quick glance at his face, save only those inscrutable, steely eyes, which had left an indelible impression upon her consciousness. She felt that she would never forget that moment when they had

burned into hers,— that if ever she saw them again, she would know them. And a conviction, almost a premonition, came to her that she was to see them again, that as unexpectedly as she had turned and met them, their owner would sometime, somewhere, cross her pathway.

So engrossed was she in her own thoughts, that she was scarcely conscious of a sudden movement on Mabel's part, or knew that she was greeting with flattered volubility a tall, ungainly looking man, with a thin, tanned face, who was bending over her chair,— the same man who had been talking to Kyle, the millionaire, and who had seemed to single her out as his eyes swept the grandstand.

The girl sat gazing vacantly at the gay, ever-moving scene before her, when Mabel leaned forward and laid a hand upon her arm.

"Dearie," she said, "I want you to know Joe's friend, Mr. Kelly,— Frank, this is my little pal Joe was tellin' you about, but don't you go makin' love to her, mind,— she's Markie Beeman's girl."

CHAPTER V

DURING the weeks which followed, Marcus was oftener away, and his trips were of longer duration. He made no explanation other than an occasional brief reference to business, and Mary asked no questions. There were rumors among "the crowd" of a girl in St. Louis, but if they ever came to Mary's ears she made no sign. Marcus was as generous as ever, and each return from a prolonged absence meant a pretty trinket for her, which she accepted with her usual equanimity. He appeared more and more constrained and restless when at home, and her inscrutable outward placidity and unquestioning attitude seemed vaguely to irritate him.

At about this time her old tutor received a windfall from some unexpected source and departed precipitately for his beloved mother-country, and Marcus made no attempt to find a successor for him; nor did Mary ask for one. But in her spare moments she pored assiduously over the books the old Frenchman had left with her, and bit by bit she added to her slender store, until she had the nucleus of as heterogeneous a library as could be conceived,—histories, odd volumes of autobiographies, the classic poets, and romances, good and bad, of all periods and schools.

She dismissed her negro servant and procured a French one, with whom she talked in the woman's native tongue, and, as time passed, with increasing fluency. Meanwhile she purchased a French novel or two which

with the aid of a dictionary she laboriously translated. No definite idea had formulated itself in her mind,—it was all a mere expression of the acquisitive instinct which was her ruling passion; not to have, but to know, to *be*.

Marcus's increasing absences threw her continually into the society of Mabel Gattle and her friends. The trainer, Frank Kelly, was frequently in their party, and although he showed no especial predilection for her, Mary had a curious sensation of an undercurrent of mutual attraction between the lanky, clean-cut, uncommunicative horseman and herself, a certain gratification in having him near her, a feeling of comradeship, a lack of that shyness and constraint which she had felt in the presence of other men.

As the summer advanced "the crowd" thinned out and the Gattles prepared for Saratoga. Mary felt rather lonely and depressed as the gay plans were discussed before her. Frank Kelly had already departed with Kyle's string of horses for the Spa, and she missed his quiet presence, more than she would acknowledge to herself. The thought of Mabel's going filled her with frank dismay,—she had not until then realized how much she had grown to depend on the companionship of the good-natured, easy-going woman, whose worldly cynicism had opened her eyes to much which she must inevitably have learned of the life which she had chosen, but the charity of whose outlook had kept her sweet and wholesome where she might have become embittered and world-weary beyond her short experience.

One stifling hot afternoon in late July Mary had accompanied her friend on a last shopping tour, and fagged and weary, they sat in Mabel's apartment with tall glasses of iced tea before them.

"Lord, what it is to be young!" sighed Mabel. "Here I am roasting, an' you look as cool as a cucumber in that pretty linen dress."

Mabel had draped herself in a beflowered kimono and her comfortably uncorseted figure was relaxed into a shapeless mound of flesh. Her nose was frankly shining, and beads of perspiration stood out upon her broad red forehead, which she mopped unavailingly with a damp wisp of a handkerchief.

"It's too bad," she went on, "for you to waste all the pretty clothes you've got, stayin' here in town alone in August. Why don't you get Markie to take you somewhere, for a while?"

"Oh, I don't think he could," responded Mary, quickly,—too quickly, the older woman thought, as she observed the sudden flush on the girl's cheek. "He's so busy, now —"

"Look here, Mary"; she set her glass down with a thud on the tray. "I ain't one to meddle in other people's business, I got enough to do mindin' my own, an' keepin' Joe straight. The hardest thing a woman's got to learn is to shut her eyes — an' the next hardest is when to open 'em. What you don't know don't hurt you, as a rule, but it may hurt your prospects. If you're wise you'll grab Markie, an' make him take you down to the sea-shore, some place."

"Marcus knows his own business best," Mary returned quietly. "I'd never ask him to do anything."

Mabel shrugged her shoulders.

"You're young yet, my dear. Pride's a pretty expensive luxury for a woman, as you'll find out one of these days.— Say!" she added, with sudden inspiration. "Wouldn't you like to come to Saratoga with Joe an' me, if I can fix it for you?"

"Like to? Oh, Mabel, I'd love it, but — I'm afraid Markie —"

"When's he comin' home? To-morrow afternoon, ain't he?" demanded Mabel. "Well, Joe an' me'll drop 'round in the evening, an' I'll talk to him. You just leave it to me, an' you'll come with us, all right.— Won't Frank Kelly be surprised!" she added with studied disingenuousness. But Mary was critically examining the tip of her shoe, and did not seem to hear her last remark.

True to her word, the following evening, Mabel plunged into the subject in her usual blunt, straightforward way before she was fairly ensconced in the widest chair Mary's box-like drawing-room afforded.

"Now, see here, Markie," she began. "Joe an' me want to take Mary with us to Saratoga for the racin'. She ain't used to the city, an' she's gettin' all peaked an' thin sittin' around cooped up here in this heat. O' course if you could take her on some of your trips,— to St. Louis, for instance—" she paused, significantly, and Marcus shifted his position somewhat uneasily.

"I been tellin' Mary she'd ought to go away somewhere for a change," he replied, with a sullen note in his usually genial tones. "I can't take her with me, an' leave her sittin' around alone in strange hotels, you know that as well as I do, Mabel. But I don't know about her goin' to the Springs,— business isn't so good as it was —"

"Oh, it won't cost a cent more'n you can afford!" Mabel interrupted, with a little gleam in her half-closed eyes. "Jim Ebbets seen you in St. Louis last week," she added, with seeming irrelevance. "He said you appeared to be,— doin'— pretty — well."

"Oh, I ain't kickin'!" Marcus interposed hastily. "How about it, Mary? You want to go?"

"I—I don't know!" faltered Mary, vaguely distressed. "I'd love it, of course, and you know you said you could only come home once in August for a couple of days,—but if it costs too much—"

"It won't!" Mabel reiterated. "Not as much as if you went to St. Louis, say. Will it, Markie?"

"Oh, all right!" Marcus writhed in his chair. "Have it your own way.—Maybe I can get a few days off between trips, an' run up, durin' the month."

So it was arranged, and the following week found Mary, wide-eyed and breathless with anticipation, speeding northward with the Gattles, and several of Joe's associates. Marcus had gone to the station with them, and his round good-natured face and little twinkling eyes were the last she saw as their train pulled out. He waved a pudgy hand, clutching its inevitable broad-banded cigar, and turned away almost before they had passed from his line of vision. When the matter of Mary's going had been finally settled, he had seemed rather relieved than otherwise, and had made no comment when Mary, scarcely realizing why she did so, packed her books and the few personal belongings which she was not taking with her, and sent them to Mabel's.

The season was in full swing when they arrived, and the Spa was at the height of its gaiety. The brilliant scene was like fairyland to Mary's still unsophisticated eyes, and the older woman enjoyed her wondering delight, and wisely did not attempt to dim her enthusiasm.

Among the sea of strange faces were many familiar ones, which Mary had seen at the races at Sheepshead,

and Mabel pointed out more than one celebrity of the moment, of one sort or another, as they sat in the hotel garden after dinner, drinking coffee and watching the play of colored lights on the cool, plashing fountains. Now and then an acquaintance would greet them — an associate of Joe's, or some one of the numerous persons Mary had met at "parties" in New York. The orchestra played dreamily, and the dancing lights glowed on scintillating jewels, and bare shoulders, and soft silken draperies. Little bursts of light laughter rose now and then above the music, and the tinkle of tall glasses and tiny cups came from nearby tables. Mary sat entranced, lost in the brilliant scene, until Mabel broke the spell with a quick touch on her arm.

"Look!" she said in a low voice. "Two tables away,— no, there, to your left. That red-haired girl in the heliotrope dress, sitting alone — Florrie Hendricks! I heard she'd come up to try to get Frank Kelly back. It's her last chance. She can't be hard up,— she's still got her pearls, but she lost a good thing when she ran away from Frank. The things he gave her, my dear, aside from the thousands she must have made from his tips at the track! Well, we're all fools, I s'pose, when we get stuck on a feller! — I wonder where Joe is, I hope he ain't tankin' up somewhere with the crowd."

Mary was conscious of a sudden curious pang as she looked at the long, slender figure in its careful pose of studied grace in the low chair. Florrie Hendricks was a finished product of the consummate art of modiste and beauty expert, from her elaborately arranged coiffure to her exquisitely slippered feet. She was ungloved,— her hands and arms were her greatest claim to beauty and she was well aware of it. Now her

snowy rounded arms were languidly outspread, the long, slender, white hands, with their rosy-tipped tapering fingers clasping the arms of her chair. Instinctively, scarcely knowing that she did so, Mary thrust her own hands beneath the table. No amount of careful attention by the most expert masseuse and manicure had availed to obliterate the deformities those dreadful years of toil had wrought. In the presence of this perfectly poised, perfectly groomed woman she felt shy and awkward and suddenly out of place. After all, what was she, a girl of the mills, doing here, in the midst of all this splendor and wealth, and fashion? A little sob rose in her throat. This other woman belonged here, she was a fitting part of the scene. It was such women as she that men like Frank Kelly loved.

As if divining her thoughts, Mabel, whose eyes had followed hers to the girl in heliotrope, leaned forward again.

"Florrie looks real swell, don't she?" she observed. "Wouldn't ever think, would you, that her mother kept an eating house for the men who worked on the railroad, an' she waited on the table! Some girls certainly have the luck!"

Suddenly, while they watched, Florrie's hands tightened on the arms of her chair, and involuntarily she leaned half forward. They followed the direction of her eyes, and saw Frank Kelly's tall figure making its way swiftly toward them between the tables. He neared Florrie, and an expectant half-smile curved her lips. The next instant she had sunk back in her chair, whiter than the cloth upon the little table before her; for he had passed without a sign of recognition,— as

if, indeed, he had not seen her,— and, coming straight to Mary, had taken both her hands in his.

“I’m mighty glad to see you, little girl!” he said. “Just met Joe, and he told me he and Mabel had brought you along, and that I’d find you out here, somewhere. I could hardly believe it!”

Mary caught her breath and smiled up at him wordlessly. Something in her face must have assured him of his welcome, however, for he gave her hands a sudden, quick pressure, then dropped them and turned to the beaming Mabel.

The talk which ensued was all of the turf and the prospects of the coming season, and Mary, who as yet knew little of racing, was content to watch Frank Kelly’s clean-cut animated face, and his quick, nervous gestures. Once she glanced covertly to where Florrie Hendricks had been sitting. Her chair was empty.

The next afternoon, and every subsequent day, found them at the track. Joe was reaping a veritable harvest, owed in great part to Frank Kelly’s confidences, and Mabel was jubilant. Every evening,—indeed every moment that he could spare from his stable,—found the trainer in constant attendance, and the outcome of the affair was a foregone conclusion to every one but Mary herself. She resolutely shut her eyes to the future, happy in the tranquil impersonal comradeship of the taciturn man who understood her every mood so well, and whose presence filled her with an utter content. Gradually she opened her childlike mind to him and gave him, timidly at first, then with increasing belief in his sympathetic interest, all the little confidences she had instinctively withheld from Marcus. Now and then she was troubled with a vague feeling of

disloyalty to the man who had taken her from the living death of the mills, and she appeased her conscience by a voluminous, laboriously written letter, minutely describing the events of her daily life, which it is doubtful Marcus took the trouble to wade through. He wrote but seldom, short brusque notes, ending in a set phrase or two of constrainedly-penned affection.

Mabel watched her anxiously. She was honestly fond of the young girl, and worried over her future.

"O' course," she remarked to Joe in the privacy of their room, "if Markie was really stuck on her, an' straight with her, we wouldn't be givin' him a square deal by throwin' her in Frank's way like this an' encouragin' him, but Markie's tired of her already, and that other girl in St. Louis —"

"Don't you bother your head about it, old girl," advised the easy-going Joe. "She's havin' a good time, ain't she? An' we're doin' fine,— Kelly's a prince! You just let 'em alone."

"I know, Joe," Mabel persisted, "but she ain't one that can take care of herself like Florrie Hendricks an' the rest of 'em,— she's different, somehow. Markie ain' goin' to look out for her much longer.— If nothing turns up for her, he'll ship her back to wherever he took her from. You know him!— Ain't it funny I can't ever get a word out of her about where she come from, an' how she lived, though she'll talk a streak about everything else under the sun."

"Whadder you care?" rejoined her spouse. "She's a nice little thing. She'd be a darn sight better off with Frank Kelly than with Markie, anyway. Seems to be kinder stuck on him, too."

"That's because he ain't started yet," Mabel remarked, astutely. "He's a slick one, Frank is!

Sendin' her flowers an' books, when he could be loadin' her with diamonds, only he's afraid of scarin' her! An' you didn't fool me a bit the other day, Joe Gattle, when you got fifty dollars of her own money from her to put up on one of Frank's tips and gave her back a cool thousand when that twenty to one shot came in under the wire in the fourth race! You never put that fifty on Saunterer — that was Frank's way of givin' her a little ready cash!"

Joe grinned unabashed.

"Next thing, he'll be askin' me to help him," Mabel went on, "an' the Lord only knows what I can say to her. She's got funny notions, you never can tell how she'll take a thing. I might queer the whole business. If she'd only got on to Markie trailin' around with this other girl, it'd be easy; but I'd hate to be the one to try to tell her!"

Chance favored Mabel, however, and materially aided her amiable plans. The following morning, Mary was sitting in a palm enshrouded corner of the garden, waiting for Mabel to emerge from the hands of her masseuse, when two elaborately gowned and coiffured young women seated themselves at a table nearby, unconscious of her presence. She recognized them as the companions of two of Marcus's intimate associates, whom she had met often at parties during the spring, and she had half risen to go to them, when the words of the first one arrested her attention, and unconsciously she sank back in her chair.

"Where's Florrie Hendricks?" she heard. "I haven't seen her in nearly a week."

"Didn't you know?" The other girl responded. "She's gone,— went to Poland Springs with old Lovell. I guess she saw she'd lost out for good with Frank Kelly,

and she wasn't goin' to stay around and see him grabbed by Markie Beeman's girl."

"Mary's a smart one, all right, for all we thought she was so green!" there was a trace of grudging admiration in the first speaker's tones. "She must know that Markie's given her the shake for that blonde in St. Louis.— Why, Jack Livermore told me they've been in Chicago together for the past two weeks, and Markie's gone on her for fair. Mary Tinney's seen the last of him, all right; and she's going to feather her nest before it's too late!"

Mary waited to hear no more. She rose precipitately, and fled blindly to her room, and there Mabel found her a half-hour later, after an anxious search, stretched face downward upon her bed. She was shuddering from head to foot, and the face she raised to Mabel was white and strained, but her eyes were tearless and very bright, and there was a latent hardness in their amber depths which the older woman had never encountered there before that moment.

"Mary!" she cried. "What is it? What's happened, dearie?"

"Nothing," said Mary, briefly. "I—I don't feel very well, that's all. I don't think I'll go out to the races this afternoon."

"You tell me what it is, this minute!" demanded Mabel, vigorously. "Have you seen Frank this mornin'?"

Mary shook her head, with an involuntary shudder.

"Somebody been talkin' to you?—Tellin' you things?" Mabel persisted.

"No, oh, no!" Mary replied quickly, glad to be able to evade the question. "It's nothing, really, Mabel.

I — I feel better, now. I'll go out to the track, if you want me to."

A knock on the door was a welcome interruption, and put a temporary end to Mabel's questioning. The intruder proved to be a messenger, with two enormous corsage bouquets and a long box, from the end of which protruded the stems of an armful of Catherine Mermets. Mabel pinned her orchids complacently at her belt, but Mary stood regarding hers with a sort of horror in her eyes. Then she took them up resolutely, and buried her hot face in their cool, waxen fragrance.

After the races, the trainer joined them, and they drove out to the lake. It was delightfully sylvan and cool, and tranquil after the heat, and noise, and excitement of the track, and after they had refreshed themselves with tea and certain tall amber-colored iced drinks, they strolled idly along the border of the lake, while the sun sank behind the trees, and a little whispering breeze of early evening stirred the surface of the water and fluttered the lace of Mary's scarf.

"I don't want to go walkin' in no woods!" grumbled Joe, as his wife pulled him resolutely along the winding path. "I want to go back to the hotel an' cast up accounts.— I sure made a killin' to-day."

"You come on!" Mabel said, firmly. "We'll walk slow till they get out o' sight an' then we'll lose 'em, an' go back to the C'sino an' wait for 'em,— see, Joe? I bet you somethin's comin' off, right now. Mary nearly had a fit at the hotel this mornin',— she wouldn't tell me, what it was about, but she must've overheard some talk, maybe 'bout Markie. If it ain't plain sailin' for Frank now, I miss my guess."

The couple ahead strolled along in a silence which

all at once seemed to hold a trace of constraint. Mary glanced now and then half curiously, half timidly at the inscrutable face of the man beside her, as, lost in his own thoughts he gazed out musingly at the deepening shadows on the lake. Abruptly, he broke the silence.

"It's been good to see you up here, little girl," he said. "You were mighty kind to give me so much of your time. It's kept me straight, and from — well, from making a damn fool of myself, generally. I'm a lonesome sort of a feller, Mary. I don't like many people, and hardly anybody likes me, except for inside information, or whatever else they can get out of me; and every time I get a rotten deal, or somebody plays me for a sucker, I crawl back further into my shell. You've been a bully little chum,— I won't forget this month, here, I can tell you!"

It was the longest speech Mary had ever heard him make, and some undercurrent in his tones made her tremble from head to foot but she steadied her voice, and said quietly:

"You've been very kind to me. You've made our stay here very happy for all of us. The season is half over already, ain't — isn't it,— only two weeks more! Where do you go then,— to the South?"

"No. I'm sailing for the other side next month with the string."

"The other side? — Europe?" Mary was unaware of the consternation in her voice. "You're going to Europe — next month!"

"Yes. I'll be gone a year — maybe two or three. Mary," he turned suddenly and placed his hands quietly on her shoulders. "Mary, will you come with me? — Don't think I'm a damn scoundrel, little girl, I never double-crossed another feller in my life, but there are

things you don't know, that I can't be the one to tell you about —"

"If you mean about Marcus Beeman and — and that other girl, Frank, I do know." Mary's voice was curiously even. "I've known for some time, though I only realized to-day that everybody else knew about it, too. I only stayed on with Marcus because he seemed to want me to, and he's been very kind to me. My — my home was dreadful, and he took me from it all and made me happy, for a little while. Now I know that I shall never see him again,— at least, not in the old way."

"What did you mean to do,—go back to your home?"

"Oh, no,—never that!" Mary shuddered and closed her eyes as a sickening wave of memory swept over her. Then she steadied herself and went on. "I meant to try to find some sort of employment —"

"Employment!" Frank broke in. "What could you do? You couldn't give up this life, child,—nothing gets into your blood like luxury, and money, and the things it can buy. You've got to go on, now you've begun. Come to Europe with me next month! You told me how anxious you were to know things,—you'll learn more in a year travelling around than studying books for a lifetime. And I swear I'll be good to you, Mary! You can have everything on God's green earth that money can buy. I want you — I need you, little girl! You don't care for me now, but maybe you will, some day,—maybe I can make you care. Will you come with me, Mary,—will you?"

"Oh, I don't know, Frank!" she said piteously. "I don't know!"

"Well, I won't say anything more about it, now," he

said gently. "Come, we'll go back to Joe and Mabel. You talk it over with her, if you like,—she's a good sort, the best ever, and she's a real friend of yours. She'll give you the straight tip. I'll be at the hotel to-night, and if you don't want to come to me, little girl, why—don't see me. But if you'll come, and put your hand in mine, I'll know that you can trust me,—that everything's all right!"

The instant that Mabel saw them approaching in the twilight, and caught a glimpse of Mary's face she clutched Joe's arm in a vice-like grip which made that gentleman wince.

"Joe! He's done it!" she exclaimed, half under her breath. "How do you s'pose she took it?"

"Ouch! Leggo! You needn't take my arm off! How should I know?—Why don't you ask her?"

"I'm goin' to, you can bet on that, just as soon as ever we get back to the hotel!"

If Mary had been undecided in her own mind as to the advisability of consulting Mabel, that energetic person forestalled her. Following the girl to her room, she took the bull by the horns in her usual blunt, good-natured fashion.

"Look here, Mary, what's Frank been sayin' to you? You needn't try to tell me it's nothin', like this mornin'. O' course, if you don't want to tell me anything, you don't have to, but—"

"Oh, I do, Mabel!" Mary turned impulsively to the older woman. "I couldn't tell you this morning, because I was—ashamed, somehow. But now,—I don't know what to do! I've felt for so long that Marcus had changed toward me, and I knew about that girl in St. Louis; but I stayed with him because he's been so kind to me,—he's done more for me than I can ever

tell you. Well, this morning I heard Hattie Fortescue and Julia Henderson,—Maxie Blumenberg's girl,—talking about Marcus. They said he was in love with this other girl, and that I had seen the last of him, and I was trying to — trying to —”

“To grab Frank Kelly, I suppose,—nasty little cats! Dearie, I'm real sorry about Markie. He's a nice boy, but he runs after every new face. It don't seem to be in his nature to be true to anybody, for long. It's lucky you never really cared for him.”

“Oh,—I —” began Mary, faintly.

“He was good to you, of course,—but he was good to himself, too, Mary; don't forget that! You've been square with him, you've got nothin' to be sorry for. He's served his turn, and you made him happy,—now forget him. Frank Kelly's just crazy about you, everybody can see it.— You're a lucky girl!” she added, suddenly. “You'll be happier with him than you was with Markie. What was he sayin' to you this afternoon?”

“He,—he —” Mary's voice was a mere whisper. “He's going to Europe next month with Mr. Kyle's stable, and — and — he asked me to go with him.”

“Europe? — Well, if that ain't splendid! — Though I'll miss you a whole lot, dearie. It's the chance of a life-time for you!” Mabel's broad face was wreathed in the broadest of smiles.

“But — but you talk as if it was all settled,—as if it was a matter-of-course —”

“Well, isn't it?” Mabel demanded. “For Heaven's sake, what did you tell him?”

“I said I — I didn't know!”

“Mary, are you a little fool? — Are you goin' to hang around Markie till he tells you to go?”

Mary shrank away, and covered her face with her hands.

"I know that sounds horrid, but you've got to wake up and face things, like any other girl," Mabel went on, not unkindly. "You don't care for Markie, an' he's tired of you. Frank's in love with you an'— you like him, don't you?"

There was a little pause, and then Mary nodded, still with her face hidden.

"Well, then," said the older woman, triumphantly, "what on earth are you thinkin' of?— Do you want to go to work in a store at six per, an' get tired of it, an' pick up with some cheap feller that couldn't do a thing for you, an' waste the best years of your life? You'll go abroad with Frank, an' thank your stars, like a sensible girl!— When'll you see him again?"

"He's coming to-night, after dinner." Mary spoke reluctantly, as if the words were dragged from her unwilling lips, but her voice had steadied, and her face, when she turned to her friend was set in resolute lines.

"Good Lord!" Mabel rose suddenly. "I hadn't an idea in the world it was so late! We'll have to hurry an' dress."

"I'm not coming down, Mabel — now. I don't want any dinner. I'll stay up here, until — until he comes."

Mabel opened her lips, but an unaccustomed feeling of delicacy checked her. After a pause, in a tone scarcely less embarrassed than the girl's had been, she said,

"All right. I guess we'll all go out to supper together, anyway. I got to hurry, or Joe'll go down to the bar to wait for me, an' you know what that means!"

When the door had closed behind Mabel's hastily departing figure, Mary went slowly to her window, and

sat long, staring out over the twilit garden with unseeing eyes. She felt half sick, and although a deadening lassitude enveloped her, she was trembling from head to foot. Not from fear, for the same indomitable determination for self-preservation which had overridden her terrors of the unknown, and driven her relentlessly into the arms of the first man who had offered to take her from the abject wretchedness and squalor of her life, possessed her now with all-encompassing strength. She had not consciously been physically attracted by Frank Kelly, nor on the other hand had he ever been repellent to her. Indeed, it seemed not to be the man himself on whom her thoughts were centred. It was as if some strange, impersonal struggle was going on within her, the import of which she could not grasp,—a struggle far greater, deeper, than had been that between her innate purity and the dire exigencies of her meagre miserable existence. She could not realize that it was the final intuitive rebellion of her womanhood against the violation of its primal monogamous instinct,—she only felt wretched, and desolate, and lonely, and very little and helpless; and the future loomed before her impenetrable, menacing and enshrouded in a pall of nameless horror.

But through it all, she knew what the outcome of the struggle would be,—that the same relentless man-made conditions which had driven her from a life of honest toil and abuse and starvation to the realm of the human pariah would drive her on and on, fighting with brain, and body, and soul for the right to live, and to make of her destiny that which she willed.

The twilight faded to a velvety dusk through which soft lights presently twinkled, and the rainbow radiance of the fountains flung out tinkling, feathery prisms of

mist-like spray. The eerie, plaintive wail of violins rose faintly to her window, above the sullen throb of the cellos, and the solitude became peopled with dainty fairy-like figures, whose laughter fell upon her ears with the vague unreality of a dream. And still she sat motionless, tense, her whole being engrossed with the age-old struggle within her.

An hour later Frank Kelly stood in a secluded corner of the veranda, waiting for his answer with an impatience and anxiety which awakened in him a growing wonder. Had he ever definitely formulated his sensation in his own mind, he would have thought himself long dead to all genuine emotion,—and here he was trembling like the veriest schoolboy, half-afraid, longing with a fierce consuming hunger for the sight of her strange, maddening, inscrutable little face, the feel of her slender body in his arms, at first tense and quivering, then slowly, softly relaxing, yielding —

So wrapt was he in his own thoughts that a light foot-fall behind him did not penetrate his consciousness, and it was as if in a dream that he felt a gentle touch upon his shoulder. Then timidly, hesitatingly, it slipped down his arm, and a little cool hand nestled within his own.

CHAPTER VI

THE grey, humid mist of an early September dawn hung over the harbor, and wreathed the sharp, ugly outline of brick and mortar against the greyer sky with a delicate ethereal softness.

Mary, clinging to the rail as the great liner slipped silently, swiftly into the dim obscurity ahead, looked back with straining eyes to where the dock had receded into the impenetrable veil of distance, and the kind faces of Mabel and Joe had faded from her gaze — Mabel, who had been frankly and noisily sobbing, and wiping damp powder on Joe's coat sleeve. They had been her only real friends, when most she needed friendship — true and disinterested, and zealous for her welfare from the point-of-view of their world. They had done what they could for her,— henceforth she must stand alone, and weave her destiny with no guiding hand but her own.

Frank Kelly's low voice at her elbow roused her from her reverie.

"Well, Mazie!" — it was the name he best liked to call her. "That's the last of New York! We'll pass old Liberty soon, and when the sun gets high enough to chase away this fog, you'll see the Long Island shore; and later, maybe, Fire Island Light.— Better go to your stateroom and get on your steamer clothes. Your deck chair is on the starboard deck, next to mine,— I arranged about that,— and your seat in the dining-saloon, too."

"Oh, I'm glad! Then I won't be — lonely, will I?" Mary smiled bravely, and for just an instant her hand rested upon his arm in an unconscious, appealing, little gesture which sent the blood throbbing to his temples.

"Lonely? Poor kid, of course you'll miss Mabel and Joe and the rest, but you'll meet a lot of good fellows, as soon as we get on the other side." He spoke soothingly, as if to a child, adding with gentle artfulness: "And think what a lot you'll have to tell Mabel when we go back! Now run along, and unpack. I'll meet you on deck in an hour,— got to meet some men I know, first, in the smoking room."

A cable from Kyle had at the eleventh hour necessitated the trainer's sailing a steamer ahead of the one on which he had previously engaged passage for Mary and himself. He was too well known a figure in the sporting world for them to have risked travelling openly together, and she was to have travelled under her own name and have had a stateroom to herself.

Now, however, because of the overcrowded condition of this ship, Mary was to have a companion, and she looked forward in trepidation to their acquaintance. Save only Mabel Gattle she had known no women intimately but her slatternly mother and sister, and the thought of five days of close association with a stranger was far from welcome to her.

She opened the stateroom door slowly, timidly, and entered. The spare berth beneath the port was heaped with luxurious, huge-monogrammed travelling cases and kit bags and in their midst a young woman sat.

At the first glimpse of her, Mary's fears vanished, and she came forward unhesitatingly. The woman before her was still youthful in appearance, slender and exquisitely pretty, but the face she slowly raised at the

opening of the stateroom door was a tragic one, and the look in her dazed eyes was that of an animal, mortally stricken.

"Oh!" cried Mary, going to her impulsively. "Are you sick? Can't I do something for you? — I — I am to share the stateroom with you, you know," she added, as if in explanation for her intrusion.

"Thank you," the other answered quietly, after an almost visible effort. "You're very kind, but — there's nothing you can do. I — I am not well, that's all."

"But shan't I call the maid,— stewardess, I think they call her?"

"No." The other woman's hands tightened suddenly in her lap as if she could barely control herself, and Mary's quick eye observed the tension under which she was evidently suffering.

"Then I guess you want to be by yourself for a while, don't you? I only came down to get into my steamer things, I won't be a minute."

The other woman watched her dazedly as she deftly slipped into her cloak, and tied a heavy veil over her small jaunty hat and rippling red gold hair.

"You are sure I can't do anything to help you?" Mary paused at the door. "You — you are travelling alone, aren't you?"

"Yes,"— there was an undercurrent of deeper meaning in the woman's hopeless tones than the mere words implied — "I am travelling — quite — alone."

"Well, if there's anything I can do for you just send for me, I'll be on deck all the morning.— My name's Mary Tinney," she added, shyly.

"You are very kind," the other woman reiterated mechanically. She said nothing more, and even before the door had closed behind Mary, she seemed lost in her

own misery, to have forgotten the girl's very existence.

Her delicate wan face haunted Mary as she made her way to the deck, and even the host of strange faces, and bright sunshine — which had burst forth miraculously, driving away the lingering mists, and turning the bay into a glistening, shimmering expanse of deep green-blue and silver,— and the stir, and bustle, and general confusion of the first hours of the voyage, failed to distract her thoughts from the unknown tragedy upon which she had stumbled.

She had not noticed the signs which an older, more experienced woman would immediately have discerned — the over-elaborateness of dress, the ultra exotic perfume, the too-lavish use of cosmetics — the elusive, indefinable something which unmistakably stamped her unknown companion of the stateroom as *déclassée* — she thought only of the evident suffering, the overmastering sorrow which she had involuntarily read in the woman's face.

Frank Kelly noticed her preoccupation when, a little later, after a few words of studied politeness for the benefit of whoever of their fellow-passengers chanced to be near, he settled himself in the chair at her side.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in a low tone. "You look sort of upset. Anything worrying you, Mazie?"

Briefly, and in cautious tones, she told him of her stateroom companion, and her voice thrilled with impetuous sympathy as she described the evident shock and grief under which the strange woman was prostrated.

Frank listened, and frowned thoughtfully when she had finished. After a few minutes' desultory conversa-

tion he arose and wandered off in the direction of the main saloon, and Mary turned her attention to her neighbors on the left of her chair.

She saw a long, angular figure closely enswathed in multitudinous rugs, and rising from them a thin, sharp-featured face surmounted by an iron-grey fringe of hair and an uncompromising felt hat of aggressive stiffness. Two beady black eyes, set close together and spanned by thin dark brows, encountered her, and she glanced away hurriedly, reading disparagement in their cold gaze. After a prolonged and annihilating stare, the lady turned her head and leisurely took up in her claw-like hands, the book which had dropped to her lap.

Mary felt a vague sense of antagonism and her spirits fell even lower. She heartily wished for Frank's return, and presently, as if in answer to her unvoiced desire, he strolled up and seated himself again beside her.

"Her name's Miss Rhoda Dering,—the lady in your stateroom," he remarked. "She's not going on to Cherbourg, like us, but landing at Liverpool,—most likely making for London. I'd steer clear of her, Mazie,—you can't tell what kind of trouble she's in."

"Oh, but she *is* in trouble!" Mary cried. "And if I could help her, any — I'm so sorry for her. She's young, Frank, and alone, and so pretty, and she looks as if something had fallen on her and crushed her!"

"Well, don't let your heart run away with you, little girl!" The trainer's voice was unmoved, but his glance lingered on hers with a warmth which made her blush rosily, and lower her eyes. "There's lots of trouble and misery in the world, Mazie,—don't take this woman's too much to heart. Be decent to her, of course, but don't get too thick with her."

Mary sat in silence, watching the horizon line rise slowly and fall beyond the deck-rail. This, then, was the code of civilisation, of the world. Those who were happy and free from care were safe companions,—those whom life and its vicissitudes had bruised and maimed were to be carefully avoided, lest the cloud of their misery encompass those about them! The pitiless, inexorable truth stirred in the awakening mind of the girl a mad surging rebellion, the germ of a dominating idea greater than the obsession of mere selfish acquisitiveness which had been her ruling passion,—an idea which, born in a whirlwind of resentment against the relentless law of humankind, was, in turn to breed the resolution and power to make of her own life something greater and finer than she could then conceive.

Frank's prudence and discretion only fanned the flame of her impetuous sympathy, and throughout the day, despite the novelty of the scene about her, her thoughts wandered again and again to the woman in her stateroom and her unspoken sorrow.

Mary's hesitating visits to her cabin found her fellow-voyager wrapped in a semi-stupor, and the girl lacked the temerity to attempt to break down her reserve. All during the long night, however, Mary heard the dry, tearless sobs which racked the slender body of Rhoda Dering. At last, toward morning, when Mary felt that she could not endure it a moment longer the woman fell into a restless moaning sleep.

It was so that Mary left her, and crept up on deck in the grey light of the early day, to find Frank Kelly there before her. They walked briskly about the deck for an hour, and the fresh salt wind whipped the blood into her cheeks and lips, and smoothed away the shadows of fatigue about her eyes. Later, she had en-

sconced herself in her chair and was engrossed in a book when her angular neighbor appeared. After settling herself with much deliberation and the aid of two stewards, and a maid, she favored the young girl with a prolonged scrutiny as on the previous day.

"I guess she about made up her mind that I wouldn't bite!" Mary told Frank afterward, somewhat ruefully. "Anyway, I could see out of the corner of my eye that she was fixing herself to say good-morning, but I didn't look up. I—I'm kind of afraid of her, Frank! Of all her sort of women, I mean."

"Well, you needn't be!" the trainer answered, quickly. "You're happy, aren't you, Mazie?"

"Yes,—oh, yes, Frank!"

"And you've made me happy,—happier than I've ever thought I'd be, again. And you're not hurting anybody else,—you can afford to let that woman and her kind alone. Besides," he added, with quiet humor, "I saw the card tacked on her chair,—her name's Pfister-Jenks. You needn't be afraid of any one with a name like that. You can only be sorry for 'em!"

Mary smiled faintly, but made no response.

Novel as the surroundings were, her days on ship-board slipped by uneventfully. She strolled on deck with Frank or sat quietly reading in her chair, and made no acquaintances. Mrs. Pfister-Jenks had tentatively commenced a frigid conversation, and finding that the young girl's reserve quite equalled her own, she thawed with curious interest, but met with no response. Early in the voyage Mary had quietly discouraged the good-natured advances of more than one fellow-passenger, who discovering that she was travelling by herself, had sought to lighten her solitude, and beyond a shy morning greeting to the others at their table in the

dining-salon, she spoke to no one. She was almost constantly with Frank, and although several curious pairs of eyes followed them about the deck, she believed that their quiet companionship passed without comment.

Mary proved a capital sailor, and often during the long, lazy, sunny afternoons, she would lie in her chair, her book opened, gazing with unseeing eyes out over the broad, infinite expanse of sapphire sea, her thoughts drifting aimlessly back over the events of the past few months, and the magical changes they had wrought in her life. Whenever a reminder of Marcus flashed across her mind, it brought with it no disquietude. In the few weeks which had elapsed since she caught her last glimpse of him through the car window, on the day she had started for Saratoga with the Gattles, so much had come into her life that her association with him had receded into the background of her memory. She was puzzled and amazed at first by the impersonal tenor of her thoughts toward him — it was as if he had been to her the merest of acquaintances. All memories of their closer life, all reminders of their intimacy she put resolutely from her mind, feeling vaguely that they were a disloyalty to Frank, and to him she meant to be "square," just as, according to her self-evolved code, she had been honest with Marcus Beeman.

The break with that self-sufficient young man had been accomplished with astonishing ease and despatch. When Mary had decided to cast her lot with the trainer, she wrote frankly to Marcus, telling him without bitterness of her knowledge of his latest infatuation, and of her own plans for the future. She received in reply the longest letter he had ever written,— a unique epistle, in which his evident relief strove with self-pity and pathetic reproaches, and wound up with a lofty sem-

blance of magnanimity and unselfish sacrifice. She smiled as she read it,—it was so thoroughly like Marcus!—and dismissed him from her life without a sigh of regret that he had entered it. He had served his purpose, and the incident was closed, forever.

Little Miss Dering had kept to their stateroom, but after the first night out, her trouble, whatever its nature, had abated to quiet apathy, and she had begun to take a listless interest in her young companion, and to show her gratitude for the girl's whole-hearted, unquestioning sympathy, and impulsive kindness. At noon on the third day out, when Mary went below to smooth her rebellious hair for luncheon, she found the stateroom deserted, and after an anxious search, discovered her fellow-traveller on a remote corner of the deck, wrapped in rugs. A faint color, born of the salt breeze, had tinged her wan face, but her eyes, big and limpid and unutterably despairing, stared out over the grey waste of waters with an age-old weariness in their depths. Mary seated herself determinedly by her side, and ignoring the forced cordiality of her welcome talked as rapidly and amusingly as she could. The conversation perforce was a rather one-sided affair, and inadvertently she disclosed more than she meant, for although the woman at her side asked no questions, she gradually evidenced an interest, at first curious, then with sympathetic understanding. Mary felt rather than observed the change in her companion's mental attitude, but she saw with relief that the despondent look in her eyes had given place momentarily to an awakened interest in the life about her.

Frank made his appearance, and Mary presented him shyly, betraying unconsciously, in her confusion, the entire situation to the keen, world-weary eyes of the

older woman, who smiled faintly, and held out her thin hand to the trainer with a few quiet words of conventional greeting. Mary caught no hint of underlying meaning in the attitude of her new friend, but Frank Kelly was instantly cognisant of her perfect understanding.

"She's a good sort, I guess, Mazie," he remarked later, as he and Mary promenaded the deck together. "I'm glad you were kind to her. She looks as if she'd been through a little hell of her own,— and she must've been a mighty pretty woman, too, before this trouble, whatever it was, bowled her over."

"Poor thing! She seems so helpless, Frank, that's what makes me feel so very badly about her,— as if her life had ended, and it was no good going on!"

"Oh, she'll get over it," he returned absently, unconscious of the unclothed brutality of his philosophy. "Women always do."

The careless phrase lingered in her memory for many days. That was man's point of view, man's easy acceptance of a woman's capacity for suffering, for endurance. Frank was the gentlest, kindest, biggest-hearted man she had known. If this was his attitude what could she expect of the rest of the world? A grudging admiration if she held her own, or a pitiless indifference if her strength failed? Just as a few short months before she had blindly, half-savagely seized upon the only way open to her to save herself from her wretched existence, in open defiance of the law of God and man, so now she must fight on, and always, for the rest of her life, under the rules laid down by her relentless adversaries, with the weapons that lay in her hand. But if she must expect no quarter, at least she would give none.

Her friendship with her stateroom companion increased amazingly, although Miss Dering vouchsafed no information about herself, and seemed incurious concerning Mary's past environment and future plans. When she came on deck on the day following her first appearance, she found the young girl's chair, and another, beside her own.

"I—I suppose I should have asked you, first," Mary avowed, a trifle shamefacedly. "Fr— Mr. Kelly said I should, but I was so afraid you might refuse, and now you can't even if you want to, can you? You see, I'm so lonely!— I promise I won't bother you when you don't want to talk."

The quick tears sprang to the other woman's eyes as she saw through the girl's generous subterfuge.

"My dear, I'm so glad you wanted to come," she said, "although I should never have suggested it. I thought you had quite enough of me down in the stateroom. I am not— very good company, now, I am afraid. You are too young, too happy to have sadness about you constantly, and I—I am not a— happy person."

It was the first time she had touched upon her sorrow, and Mary, realizing that the other was nearing the breaking-point, spoke quickly to give her time to recover herself.

"I know. I'm so very sorry! But you'll feel ever so much better to be up on deck. I love to watch the people, don't you?"

"Do you?" The voice was scarcely audible.

"Oh, yes! There are so many different kinds— types, Monsieur Lazard, my teacher, would call them, I think. And when they're all sort of penned in here, and you watch them day after day, you get to feel as if you knew them better than they do, themselves. That's

the woman who sat next me on the other side of the deck,—there, the one in the purple golf-cape. She's the wife of a college professor, the stewardess told me, and her name is Pfister-Jenks. Isn't that awful? She has eyes like gimlets, too, and she just bores them through me. I believe Mr. Kelly was afraid to be left alone with her,—he sat by me, you know,—that's why he had his chair moved around here, too."

"Yes, I see." Miss Dering turned to her at last, with a faint smile. She had regained her composure, and some of the brightness of the day seemed to have crept into her face. "This is your first trip over, isn't it?"

"Yes, and I can hardly wait for the time to pass until we land, I'm in such a hurry to see everything! Only three days more!"

"Three — days — more," Miss Dering repeated, as if to herself.

"Are you going to France, too?" Mary asked inadvertently, forgetting what Frank had learned of her companion's destination.

"No, to England,—to London," her eyes narrowed.

"Oh, you have friends there?"

"No. That's why I'm going there. I don't want to have my friends about me, just now—" she broke off suddenly, then added, with a studied irrelevance, "Your friend, Mrs. Something-Jenks is passing again. She seems quite interested."

Mary turned and saw the cold, supercilious eyes appraising her companion, with critical disapproval. She flushed hotly, but Miss Dering smiled in quiet amusement. "She's so terribly — nose-y!" Mary said resentfully, when the object of her comment had stalked

on out of earshot. "She asked me the freshest questions!"

"I've met her sort before," her companion observed. "People who live in a small circumscribed community always take an ungodly interest in other people's affairs and try to run the universe according to their own narrow-minded point of view. They have to, I suppose, to keep from being bored to death. I know, I grew up in a college town.— You'll meet lots of her kind, if you travel much."

"Well, I mean to keep out of her way," remarked Mary. "She makes me — uncomfortable."

But Mrs. Pfister-Jenks had a mission. What she was pleased to call her sense of duty had been aroused and any attempt to evade her was hopeless.

She came up the next morning when Mary, in an unguarded moment, was standing alone at the deck-rail, and brought her batteries to bear.

"You are up early, I see," she began. "Is your friend well enough to come on deck to-day?"

"My friend?" Mary's thoughts had been far away, and she had returned with a start to the unwelcome presence at her side.

"The lady you are travelling with," Mrs. Pfister-Jenks explained helpfully, with what was intended to be a bland smile.

"Oh, Miss Dering, you mean? I'm not travelling with her." Mary paused, annoyed with herself for her candor; then added: "She happens to share my stateroom."

"Ah, I imagined that. My dear girl, you must not be offended, but you are very young and inexperienced to be travelling alone. Why you are, and what your

people can be thinking of, I do not inquire—" She was warming up to her subject, but Mary faced her, ominously calm.

"That is very considerate of you," she remarked, evenly.

Mrs. Pfister-Jenks stared, and her small eyes snapped.

"It is my duty to tell you that you have chosen two very undesirable acquaintances,— the most undesirable for a young girl that could be found on board. The woman I know nothing about—" she spoke almost regretfully, "but her appearance gives her away unmistakably— those ridiculous high-heeled shoes, and that conspicuous gown, and her whole manner, quiet as she seems— Of course, you cannot be a judge of such things, but I feel convinced that she is not at all the proper person for a young, unprotected girl to know. As for the man—"

"Yes?" Mary's tone was still quiet, but she breathed quickly, and a little red spot glowed in each cheek. "What about the man?"

"He is a trainer,— a common horse-trainer, a mere stableman employed by James T. Kyle, the millionaire. You see I ignore him! I have heard several stories about him which I cannot repeat, but he is a very reprehensible character, and you are far from safe in his company. A young girl cannot be too careful—"

"Stop!" Mary's voice trembled in spite of her attempt to control herself. "You have no right to speak to me like this, Mrs.— Jenks. Why I am travelling alone is my own affair, and my friends are of my own choosing. You—you—you are insulting!" She was furious to find herself on the verge of tears. "Please don't speak to me again!"

Mary swung about on her heel and left the astounded Mrs. Pfister-Jenks to stare balefully after her, in speechless indignation.

The last night of the voyage came, and with the darkness, a pall of fog descended and enveloped them like a shroud. They had left Queenstown at twilight, and all through the dark hours they crept at half-speed through the churning Irish Sea, the eerie moan of the fog horn cleaving the gloom like the wail of a lost soul.

Miss Dering shivered involuntarily as she lay curled up in her berth, and watched Mary occupied with her packing. The atmosphere seemed charged with a foreboding as of impending disaster, and the spirits of both were depressed and overwrought. Mary talked as cheerfully as she could, but her efforts were forced and spasmodic, and finally a silence fell between them. Somehow the morrow and all that it would bring, the advent into a new and strange world which had been so eagerly looked forward to in confident anticipation became all at once a thing to dread,—a vague fear of what might lie before her, of the vicissitudes of the uncertain future upon which she had so venturesomely embarked, clutched at the young girl's heart with a strength she could not shake off. She felt engulfed by a sickening sense of loneliness and helplessness, and longed with all her soul for the comforting, reassuring presence of Mabel Gattle, with her sure knowledge of life as she had found it, and her easy-going optimism. In her sudden, unreasoning despondency Mary turned to the woman whose sorrow she had tried to assuage and minister to, and Miss Dering recognized the note of unconscious appeal in the girl's wistful voice, and roused herself from the lethargy of desolation to which she

had succumbed, to give what small measure she could of cheer and comfort to her companion.

"Of course you'll feel strange, at first, in a foreign country,—it's like taking a plunge in cold water," she observed. "But once you look about you, you'll find the people are not so different, after all. In spite of their queer customs and manners, they're just as human as your friends at home. And you'll be learning every minute, if you keep your eyes open,—learning things you will never forget, things which will be of value to you all the rest of your life. And oh, the good times you'll have! I envy you. What it would mean to be seventeen again, and light of heart, with love to lean upon, and all Europe lying before one delightful, unexplored, like a dream of fairyland come true!" She paused, with a little catch in her voice, then went on in a lighter tone. "You will love Paris. It's paradise to a young, pretty woman whose star is in the ascendant,—and Ostend, and Aix, and Brussels, and Buda-Pesth and Berlin, ah!"

"You've been to all those places!" Mary turned wide eyes to her, her despondency forgotten in the magic vista opened before her. "How wonderful! I—I wish you were coming to Paris, too. Will you stay in London very long?"

The other woman drew her rug about her, and sank back, with a little shudder.

"I don't know. I haven't thought of anything beyond—London. It doesn't matter where I go—"

Her low voice trailed uncertainly into silence, and there was no sound save the wash and swirl of angry waters against the port, and the dull, insistent, menacing boom of the fog-horn.

Mary was angry with herself for her thoughtless-

ness, in reminding the other of her present unhappiness, but could think of no way to undo the harm she had so tactlessly wrought. Miss Dering's eyes were closed and she lay motionless, but the lines of sadness in her face did not relax, and presently, as Mary watched, a tear — the first Mary had seen her shed, — stole down her cheek.

In an instant the girl was kneeling at her side, and had taken her thin hand in both her warm ones.

"Oh, won't you tell me?" she cried, softly. "I am so sorry! I wish I could help you. — Won't you tell me what your trouble is?"

There was a pause. Then the woman's other hand grasped hers convulsively, and low and sobbingly the story came, — the brief, trite tragedy which confronts so many who tread the path Mary had deliberately, desperately chosen.

"I will tell you! It is wrong of me to cloud your happiness with my trouble, but I feel as if I should go mad if I could not tell some one, — some one who can understand. You're a very young girl, but you have a wise little head on your shoulders. You've been so kind to me. I've longed to tell you, but I — I could not speak of it before.

"I was well educated — I grew up, as I told you in a college town, — and when I was only seventeen I became a stenographer for a man well-known in public life; later his private secretary. He wasn't a man who cared much for women, his life was too full, his career too absorbing, for him to turn aside for — for the sort of diversion which comes into the everyday lives of most men; but he loved me. I'm sure of that, — I'm sure he cared for me as much as a man of his temperament could care for any one. There was no question of marriage

between us, ever,—his ambitions, politically and socially were high, and I fostered them, proud of every upward step to higher influence and power, proud of his confidence, his love. I sunk myself, heart and soul and body, in his career. At first, I deliberately shut my eyes to the future; but as the years went by and our happiness was unchanged, I came to believe that it could never change, that we should go on together until life ended for one of us. He had such faith in me, in my clear sightedness, and the infallibility of my judgment, he seemed to depend on me so utterly! I did not see that I was teaching him to stand alone! At first, we travelled everywhere together, I as his secretary, of course, but as he became more prominent, I had to slip farther and farther into the background, that no slur of comment could mar his name, or be used by political enemies as a weapon against him. I suffered, of course, but I was content—it was a cheap price to pay for his success. I gave him fourteen years of my life, asking nothing in return. . . . Lately I have seen less and less of him, but no doubts crossed my mind, no warning came to me of what the future held in store.

“He proposed that I go abroad for a few weeks,—urged me to go, although I didn’t want to leave him. He said I needed the change, and must be strong and well to help him make the fight of his life at the fall primaries. I consented, against my will. He was to see me off the morning the steamer sailed, but—he didn’t come. I waited, crazy with anxiety for fear some accident had happened to him. Just before the gangplank was raised, and I had made up my mind to go ashore and abandon the trip, a telegram was put into my hands. It read: ‘Unavoidably detained. Letter for you in purser’s care.’

"I was stunned. I could not think clearly, but one fact beat against my brain. If he had found time to write and despatch that letter, surely he could have come to me, if only for a moment,—at least, he could have telephoned me. I could have carried away with me the comfort of his voice! I had difficulty in locating the purser, just at the time of sailing, the delay seemed interminable,—but at last I found myself here in this stateroom with the letter in my hand. It was—the end. He is going to marry the daughter of a man who can crown his life-long ambitions by putting him in the office he covets. He would never forget me; no woman could ever be to him what I had been, and—he enclosed a letter of credit for fifty thousand dollars! He hoped other interests would come into my life, and that I would be happy."

Her voice ceased, and suddenly the tension under which she had held herself in control snapped like a thread, and she burst into a paroxysm of weeping, which seemed to rend her slender body like the torture of the rack. Mary wisely made no effort to check her, but when the storm of tears had at last spent itself, she spoke the gentle words of pity and comfort which came straight from her deeply-stirred heart. It was the first time in her life that she had come face to face with naked tragedy, and with the realization of it, her shallow immaturity fell from her, forever, and she emerged, no longer a girl, but a woman, with all a woman's intuitive knowledge of suffering, and sorrow, and bitter, immutable wrong.

They talked far into the night, and Mary felt at last that she had succeeded in infusing a vague spark of hope of the future into the desolate soul of the woman before her. She managed to obtain a half-hearted

promise that Rhoda Dering would keep in touch with her and let her know her future plans.

The night wore on and the woman fell into the quiet sleep of exhaustion; but for long hours Mary lay with wide eyes staring into the darkness, braving the turmoil of her thoughts, learning the lesson of the other's pitiful tragedy.

The morning dawned clear and bright, with a freshening breeze and a brazen sun beating down upon the scintillating sea. Mary watched eagerly, but no vision of land broke the unvarying line of sea and sky on the horizon, until late in the afternoon, when, as suddenly as if it had risen from the waters to confront them, a low grey stone mass loomed up ahead,— the fortifications behind which lay the placid harbor of Cherbourg.

The grinding of the engines ceased, and with a clanging of bells and hoarse shouting and heavy, hurried tread of feet, the huge steamer halted and rode at anchor like some tethered beast of a prehistoric age.

Mary walked down the gangplank to the waiting tug in a daze of mingled emotions, with Rhoda Dering's gentle farewell of the early morning ringing in her ears.

There was an interval of pitching and tossing, then a swift glide through still, mirror-like waters, and before Mary's wide eyes appeared a cluster of low, grey, sharply-gabled houses, and beyond a wide sweep of flat, green, smiling country-side. France!

CHAPTER VII

THE little train swayed and snorted importantly as it pulled out of the long shed and nosed its way Pariswards. At first the track intersected curious, winding, narrow-cobbled streets, and small quaintly-garbed, smutty-faced children clattered alongside, shrilly chanting their eternal, rapacious appeal, "Un pennee! Un pennee!" until the quickening speed of the engine left them far behind.

Mary, her face pressed close against the window of their stuffy carriage, was lost to the presence of Frank and their four fellow-travellers. Now and then the stately, white turrets of a cathedral flashed before her fascinated gaze, or the ivy-covered walls of a tree-embowered château. Here and there they rumbled over a rustic bridge, and she caught glimpses of groups of buxom red-cheeked women kneeling beside the swiftly rushing little stream, pounding their snowy linen, or a broad white road came into view, bordered with unbroken lines of stiffly upstanding, sombre trees,—the poplars, which Frank had told her were planted like sentinels, on every highway Napoleon and his meteoric host had trod.

Only when the twilight deepened to a velvety darkness and nothing could be discerned without save an occasional dim light twinkling by, did Mary turn to meet Frank's kindly amused eyes. They made their way to the dining-car, and Mary found to her own delight and to Frank's intense gratification that her

timidly enunciated French phrases were more than adequate for their needs. Afterward, they sat in comparative silence while the train rushed on for long hours, through the sweet, dew-laden night, and Mary dozed with her head pillowed on Frank's shoulder.

At last, close on midnight, he roused her gently, and her sleepy eyes behind a myriad of distant, fairy-like lights mirrored in the velvety depths of a slow-moving, shimmering stream, and above them an aura of glowing haze against the night sky.

"Oh," she breathed, "is it — is it —"

He nodded, smilingly.

"Paris, at last, Mazie. The end of the journey."

After that there came a confused *mélange* of impressions,—a crowd of drowsy travellers herded together by red-capped officials in the customs-office, then a medley of raucous shouts of cabmen and porters, a rush of cold night air and a swift clatter over cobbled streets in a glare of scintillating light.

Finally, the broad corridors of a huge hotel, a dainty supper she was too weary to eat, a glass of wine, and a swift sinking into dreamless sleep in the great soft funereal bed.

In the morning she was awakened by a monotonous, sing-song voice beneath their window, which intoned mournfully "La Patrie! La Patrie!" and Frank enjoyed her comments when he explained that the dirge was the French equivalent for the cheerful impertinence of the newsboys of her remembrance. Everything excited her interest and curiosity, no smallest detail escaped her, from the velvet-hung, marble-mantled magnificence of their apartment, to the vividly characteristic street-scenes through which they passed, later in the morning. Frank's days would be busy ones, and

Mary had expected to have many hours of solitude which she had planned to spend in exploring the treasure-houses of this city of her dreams, of which her tutor had told her; but a trivial, wholly feminine consideration checked her. The gowns of Mabel's choosing, which had filled her with such wondering delight now seemed cheap and tawdry, and woefully lacking in the chic smartness of the women about her in the brilliant cafés of the boulevards, and she fancied there was a shade of disparagement in Frank's glance. Her suspicion seemed confirmed by the alacrity with which he acquiesced in her tentatively voiced desires, and by the generous number of crinkled notes he placed in her hands. That night, too, under the softly tinted shades at Armenonville, he discovered an old acquaintance, a voluptuous, full-lipped beauty, with a hint of the south in the flash of her dark, heavy-lidded eyes, who awoke to enthusiastic animation at his suggestion that she pilot his young friend through the mazes of modistes and milliners.

The next day Madame Rodriguez called at their hotel in a wonderfully appointed brougham, and bore Mary off to the Maison Diane, and there the girl stood for weary hours before a tall mirror, while deft hands draped her slender body in exquisite, glowing fabrics that seemed visibly to envelop her girlish figure with a beauty almost regal. Milliners and manicures and masseuses followed, and Mary finally emerged as from a chrysalis. Carita Rodriguez laughed softly and clapped her barbarically ringed hands at Frank's astonishment when he beheld the result of her efforts, and in his admiration, Mary felt more than repaid for the long hours of preparation, and the postponed wonders of the Louvre and Cathedrals yet unvisited.

Carita Rodriguez was frequently with them, and a bearded Frenchman, whose relationship with the vivacious Chilean was unmistakably defined, made the fourth. Monsieur Laferrier awakened a vague dislike in Mary, a latent repulsion which she could not account for, even to herself. He was urbanely courteous, with the unctuous ceremony of the continental, but she felt instinctively his cynical mockery and shrank from the touch of his thin lips on her hand when he greeted her, and the side-long gleam from his rat-like eyes.

One evening, chance placed her alone with him in a closed *fiacre*, on their way to Maxim's — Frank and Madame Rodriguez had preceded them, — and he turned to her suddenly, ravenously, his waxen face bestial with passion. She felt his hot, wolfish breath on her cheek, his long arms crushing her, and a wave of hideous, nauseating disgust swept over her and all but engulfed her senses.

"My God, Mazie, what is it?" Frank cried at sight of her face, when they met in the brightly lighted entrance of the restaurant. "Are you sick?"

She swayed as she stood with her shimmering cloak drawn tightly about her shuddering form.

"Yes," she whispered through stiffened lips. "Take me home, Frank, — oh, take me home!"

With scant apologies, to the others, he placed her in a *fiacre* and said no word during their short drive to the hotel; but once in their apartment he faced her.

"Now I want to know the truth, Mazie," he said, in a stern voice she had never heard before. "What did that beast do to you?"

The tears came then, with a rush, and Mary sobbed out her story in an agony of disgust and humiliation.

When she had finished, he soothed her quietly, making no comment on what she had related to him, but there was a look in his eyes before which Mary quailed.

The next day he returned to the hotel far later than his usual time, with bruised and swollen knuckles and a lame shoulder, but radiating satisfaction and a grim complacency which Mary dared not question. He vouchsafed no explanation, but Madame Rodriguez and her companion vanished from their horizon.

Frank was having an unbroken run of success, and Kyle's horses won with phenomenal regularity. Mary attended every race unfailingly, proud of every victory for their stable's colors. Now and then she found herself studying the brilliant ever-moving throng passing in review before her, and realized with a little shake of amused impatience that she was indeed searching for a face she would recognize, seeking without conscious volition, just as she had at Saratoga, for that other man whose personality had so impressed her at Sheepshead months before, on the day Frank Kelly came into her life. The depth of the impression the unknown stranger had made upon her memory she could not explain to herself, nor why he should remain so persistently in her thoughts, but a curious fatalistic sensation of his presence recurred to her with increasing frequency, although she laughed at herself for the whimsical idea. Why should he, whoever he might be, cross her path once more,—he, out of all the millions who peopled the earth? She mentally called herself a little fool and put resolutely from her mind the memory of that cool, impersonal, questioning glance from the keen grey eyes,—only to find herself seeking them again.

On their arrival in Paris, she found a characteristic

letter awaiting her from Mabel — a rambling effusion, in which bits of gossip alternated with shrewd, good-natured advice and sincere wishes for her happiness.

The musical comedy in which Julia Henderson had been ill-advisedly starred had proved a dismal failure; Hattie Fortescue's establishment had been summarily broken up by her admirer's lawful wife and she had departed for the Hot Springs with a cloak-and-suit manufacturer; Meyer Heilman had opened another pool-room; Florrie Hendricks had lost old Lovering, and pawned her pearls, and was reported to be down and out. Of Marcus Beeman they had seen nothing. Mary experienced a curious sensation of unreality as she read; the changed atmosphere of her surroundings, the new impressions which had crowded so thick and fast upon her, had driven the life of a few weeks before far into the background of her thoughts, and the familiar names which caught her eye evoked but vague memories. She put the letter in Frank's hands without a word. Florrie Hendricks' name had never been mentioned between them, but she felt he realized that she must have known of his last infatuation. There was no room in her nature for petty jealousy, and if in his generosity, Frank wanted to help the woman who had been much to him, Mary had no desire to stand between. As usual, Frank had been noncommittal, but that he divined and appreciated her point of view he evidenced that evening.

As she stood before her mirror, fastening the shimmering folds of her gown, he came up softly behind her, and clasped about her throat a single strand of lustrous pearls. They were not ostentatiously large, but superbly matched, and formed an exquisite setting for

the youthfully rounded throat and small, well-poised head. Mary cried with delight in their sheer beauty, and her gratitude was uncalculating, unfeigned.

Save for the unfortunate incident in which the Frenchman, Laferrier, had played so ignominious a part, nothing had occurred to stem the tide of her happiness, no untoward event had dimmed her enthusiasm or checked her light-hearted irresponsible enjoyment of each new day and what it brought.

One morning, as she pinned on her hat for an early visit to her hairdresser, a sudden sharp exclamation from Frank made her turn. He had been glancing through the English papers which were brought to them daily with their breakfast coffee. Now he folded them deliberately, with a curious, shocked look on his usually immobile face.

"What is it, Frank? What is the matter?" asked Mary, sharply.

"Nothing, dear,— just something I read —"

But there was that in his tone which made Mary for once insistent. Seeing that she was not to be put off, and that his reticence was only alarming her the more, he rose and came to her, placing his arm gently about her.

"Mazie dear," he began, the words seeming to come with difficulty, "you remember your friend on the steamer, the one who was in such trouble? — Miss Der-
ing?"

"Yes!" Mary breathed, and all at once she began to tremble. He held her very close.

"Well, I — I guess it was too much for her, whatever it was. She — she's gone under, Mazie!"

"Gone under!" Her dry lips would scarcely frame the words.

"She is dead. She killed herself, last night, in London."

"Killed herself!" Mary repeated. She quietly disengaged herself from Frank's arms, and walked slowly to the window, where she stood gazing out in unseeing abstraction. Finally she turned, and to his relief he saw that her eyes were blurred with tears. "Killed herself, Frank! She said it was the end. She tried to go on, but she couldn't, she couldn't! I wonder how he will feel, when he knows! I wonder if he will see what he has done! And she, to go far away, alone among strangers, to die,—like some hurt animal crawling into a hole,—poor thing! Poor thing!"

Mary had never told Frank the pitiful story the heartbroken woman had confided to her on the last night of their journey, but now with no sense of disloyalty to the dead she sobbed it out brokenly, and he listened with a strangely moved look on his face. When her distress had somewhat abated, he said quietly:

"Perhaps it's the wisest thing, after all. The man had to go on, and sooner or later she would have had to drop out, whether he married, or not. They couldn't have lasted forever, you know,—people don't, living that way. You say she realized that at the start, Mary, and then shut her eyes to it? Well, she chose her own path, and had her happiness, and then hadn't strength enough to play the game, and face the rest of her life, alone. Poor girl! Maybe she did the right thing, after all. She isn't suffering now, or lonely, or unhappy, and she won't be, ever again, Mazie. The preacher fellers say it's a sin, but I don't know about that,—we don't any of us get a show to say whether we want to enter for the race or not, we ought

to have the right to lie down when we're distanced, or winded, or pulled!"

But Mary seemed scarcely to hear the last part of his ruminating speech. One phrase rang in her ears:

"They couldn't have lasted forever,—people don't, living this way!" she repeated, as if to herself.

"Oh, come now, Mazie!" he cried. "You know I didn't mean—I wasn't thinking of us!"

But Mary did not hear. She asked to see the papers, and he found the column headed: "Suicide of American. Beautiful Woman Kills Herself In Hotel." Together they read the meagre details which followed.

Miss Rhoda Dering, an American, a guest of the Dunkirk Hotel, had shot and killed herself in her room early the evening before. Little was known of her. She appeared possessed of some wealth, but seemed to know no one. She received no callers, nor mail and had kept much to her room. It was later learned from other sources, that she had for some years been private secretary to Waldon Norcross, the brilliant young lawyer and politician of New York, who was openly named on all sides for the lieutenant-governorship of that state at the next election. He had been communicated with, in an effort to locate the unfortunate lady's friends.

That was all,—a mere paragraph, sandwiched between an account of the last flower show and an announcement of the laying of the cornerstone for the new Chapel of Saint Agnes. To Mary, who knew the truth which lay behind the bare statement of fact, the few lines were all the more pitiful for their brevity. After a brief uncontrollable burst of tears, she made no further mention of the tragedy, and tried earnestly, for

Frank's sake to be her old bright self again; but for many days following, the delicate tear-stained face of Rhoda Dering would rise before her, and that low, piteous heartwrung voice would come plaintively to her ears in the dark hours of the night. Often, too, she would find herself trying to picture in her mind the slender curves of Rhoda Dering's soft body, rigid and immobile in death, and her beautiful face serene and calm, with the sad eyes mercifully closed, and the lines of suffering and pain swept away as by a gentle hand. One day she made a little rough sketch of her friend, as she remembered her, then thrust it hastily into her trunk for fear Frank would find it and reproach her for dwelling on a troubled memory, which he was doing his utmost to help her to forget. Somehow, it did not occur to her to destroy her first attempt at portrayal. She wanted a reminder near her of Rhoda Dering's trite, but significant story, and of the woman herself, as she had last seen her, to strengthen her in her own ultimate purpose.

Frank met many friends in Paris; and every evening finding him and Mary a part of a merry, pleasure-seeking crowd, the girl soon knew the Paris of the American sporting contingent, from the Pre-Catalan to the Rat Mort, from the staid magnificence of the Café Riche, to the garish, riotous festivity of the Bal Tabarin. She found no opportunity to carry out her plans for visiting the places of which she had dreamed, and it must be admitted that her inclination to do so had been momentarily lessened by the varied excitements of each day, and the ceaseless, inconsequent whirl in which she lived.

Among their acquaintances was an American girl, but a few years older than Mary herself; a tall, slen-

der creature, with an exquisite head poised regally upon her long, slim neck, and an unconscious grace and dignity of carriage which, wherever they went, made her the cynosure of all eyes. It was only when she spoke that the illusion was shattered; and one more worldly-wise than Mary could comprehend that the queenly bearing, unaffected as it was, and the patrician attributes, were but a throw-back to some aristocratic, possibly indiscreet ancestor. Reba Harvard's speech was unadulteratedly that of the Tenderloin, her frank reminiscences of a sort to avert the eyes of even her coterie of the half-world. With her sister,—a stout, drab-haired commonplace little woman, some years her senior, she had left America at the earnest solicitation—accompanied by a substantially persuasive letter of credit,—of a quondam admirer, and was now avowedly spreading her nets for a fresh haul. A trail of admirers followed in her wake, but she apparently considered none of them pecuniarily worthy of serious consideration save perhaps one, a dark, fiercely-bearded Russian. Baron Iverskoi was a man of undoubted wealth. His entertainments were remarkable, even in the most prodigal city in the world, and the jewels he laid at the feet of the stately Reba were as intrinsically precious as they were vulgarly barbaric.— But the source of his income was unknown. Reba told Mary vaguely that he owned "big estates, somewhere," and the revenue secured from them in some mysterious way. The source was of small moment to Reba, so long as it materialized, and none of their coterie gave it further thought.

To Mary herself, the man seemed purely negative.— She regarded him impersonally, and never asked herself whether she liked or disliked him. He was a perfect

host, his manners were of the *monde*, and Frank seemed to like him. She accepted his *camaraderie* without question.

One afternoon in late autumn, she came face to face with the Baron on the rue de Rivoli, and together they strolled across to the gardens of the Tuileries. The trees were leafless and bore almost a wintry aspect, and the chill wind sent the grey clouds scudding before them, in the path of the westerning sun. They spoke at first, naturally enough, of the living past, of which so many reminders were at hand — of the days and nights of yesterday, when stately minuets had been danced beneath the spreading branches of these same ancient trees, to the tinkle of silvery music, and the scent of patchuli, and whispers of silken gowns had stirred the soft air. Bits of the half-forgotten tales of her old French tutor came flooding back in the girl's memory; and then the Baron began speaking of his own country, its ancient rites and traditions, the majesty of its long dead past, the savage beauty of its present. He talked feelingly and well, with an irresistible passion of yearning, and Mary drank in his every word, carried away by the sheer force of the man's dominating personality, fascinated by the glimpse he gave her of an unknown and strangely, mystically beautiful world. She forgot herself, and the lateness of the hour, until six slow, reverberating tones from a distant cathedral smote accusingly upon her ear, and she jumped up from the stone bench on which they had been sitting with a little cry of dismay.

"Six o'clock! So late! Oh, Baron, I must hurry! Frank will have been at the hotel half an hour at least waiting for me!"

"And Madame Reba will have eaten all the little

chocolate cakes in Colombin's, and ruined her complexion."

"Reba? Oh, I'm so sorry! You were to meet her?"

"At five." He shrugged his shoulders, then added whimsically, "But the little cakes will more than compensate for my tardiness,—to Madame Reba. This has been enchanting, *p'tite amie*,—this meeting with you! It is not often that I speak of my own country,—it is too sacred, it lies too close to my soul to be discussed with ladies nibbling little cakes. But you—you have the mind, the heart, the sympathy!"

"It must be wonderful, your country!" she replied simply. "Wonderful,—and terrible! I hope that you will tell me more of it when we meet again."

They had crossed the rue de Rivoli once more and were walking briskly up the rue de Castiglione toward the Place Vendome. At the corner of the rue St. Honore he paused and hailing a fiacre, he placed her in it.

"When we meet again?" he asked, smilingly, with his head uncovered. "Perhaps, Mademoiselle. I start at midnight for Rome, and you—you go soon to that city of horrors, London, is it not so? But, yes, I think it may be that we shall sometime meet again."

Three days later Mary and Frank departed for England.

CHAPTER VIII

THE year which followed passed swiftly, in a whirl of kaleidoscopic impressions. Wherever they went — and in the ensuing months they saw much of the continent — they found themselves the centre of an ever-changing group, and the daily intercourses with people of widely diversified types did much to develop the mind of the young girl, and broaden and modify her point of view.

Frank remained as tenderly considerate, as unchanged in his devotion to her, as in the first days of his infatuation. He still treated her more as a comrade than a mistress, and even in the hours of their closest association, Mary felt the same peaceful sense of security and protection and untroubled content which his quiet presence had first invoked. But as the months went by, there crept into his manner a more compelling quality, into his voice the wistfulness of an appeal he would not utter. Mary felt vaguely conscience-stricken. She had kept to the letter of their agreement, but she sometimes wished, with all her strength, that she could find in her heart for him the love he craved, in return for his kindness and uncomplaining devotion. She was too honest, too guileless to pretend for him a passion which did not exist, and for that he was thankful. Gradually, however, a change came over her, a feeling of dissatisfaction, of unrest. She knew that her immediate future was safe

in Frank's hands and that because of their association alone she could, if she would, always appeal to him for any aid, whatever their future relations might change to, without fear of being denied, but she realized that he was a man, with all a man's living desire for response to his passion, his affection; and *that* she could never give him. At any moment, some one might enter his life who could give to him at least a semblance of the love he craved, and then — the face of Rhoda Dering rose before her eyes, as she had seen it last, and the pitiful stories of other women who had but lately crossed her path came racing through her brain — women who had been wooed and petted and loved — used and cast aside. At such times, she devoutly thanked whatever power had guided her wayward destinies, that love had never found its way past the barrier of rancor her early life had built about her heart, and felt confident, in her youthful surety of self, that she would never know it.

The early spring found them again in Paris for the races at Auteuil, and later, Longchamps. Mary's long-buried desire to see the Paris of which her companions knew little and cared less, crystallized into a determined effort, and one day she persuaded Frank to take her to the Louvre. It was a discouraging experiment which she never repeated. Frank had wandered about the huge galleries and corridors, bewildered, bored, and thoroughly uncomfortable. As for Mary herself, the first half-comprehended glimpse of the perfection of an art hitherto unknown to her awoke a dormant hunger for the beautiful which she vaguely felt but could not name. She was utterly ignorant, of course, of form and color, and the jargon of the studios was yet more an unknown tongue. Like a child with a

picture-book, she was interested then only in the stories the masterpieces told, and stood long before more than one of compelling mystery, longing with all her soul to know the inspiration of which these were the expression.

One marvellous canvas, above all others, awed and fascinated her. It was in one of the farther galleries, and badly hung, so that the light distorted rather than revealed its weird beauty and power, but its theme held for her a significance, undreamt of by its creator. It was the nude body of a young woman floating down a dark river, with the pale light of the moon flooding the rigid limbs with a baleful, greenish glow — and the face was as the face of Rhoda Dering.

Many times in the days which followed, Mary stole away for a quiet hour before this canvas whose history, whose very name she did not know. Nor did she care to learn its story. The crux of it was before her; a symbol into which she read a vital meaning.

Her discontent, her vague unrest, grew. Frank's unflinching kindness and consideration, which had filled her with compunction, now irritated her. The round of pleasure, in which they had found such congenial companionship in each other, had grown monotonous and empty. It was not that, at eighteen, she had grown blasé and world-weary. On the contrary she was more keenly alive, more vitally attuned to new sensations and impressions, than before. It was that her active mind was reaching out more vividly on every hand, and there was nothing within her present environment with which to satisfy her insatiable desire. At last, amid much groping, troubled thought, the conviction was borne that, just as she had outgrown the sensuous, volatile, easy-going Marcus, when first her mind

stirred, so now she had outgrown the limitations of Frank Kelly's mentality — outgrown even the possessive care that had at first seemed such blessed protection, and now was but a thrall which bound her; and her ambitious brain rebelled against the complacent trivialities which made up her existence. She felt the same mad surge of revolt as when, in the buried past, she had stood in the squalid hovel her people called home, and faced her wretched mother and sister with the bitter cry that she resented not so much the fact that she had had no chance for better, higher things, but that she must slowly, inevitably grow "not to care."

It was at this period of her psychological development that one grey morning she left the Louvre, and scarcely heeding the direction of her aimless feet, wandered, lost in thought in the gardens of the Tuileries. She came to herself with a start, half-forgotten memory flashing across her consciousness. It was here, months before, that she had had that memorable talk with Baron Iverskoi. She sank down upon a nearby bench, and gave herself up to the memory of it. She recalled his very words as he had told her of his proud savage country, crouched but uncowering; mighty in its pent-up strength. She seemed to hear his yearning impassioned tones; to see the fire in his eyes; to feel the powerful emotion which had swept away his reticence before the plaything — the mere child of pleasure — which he must have thought her. Yet had he not divined some mental response, some spark of sympathetic understanding, would he have given her this glimpse of his inmost thoughts?

The afterglow of the man's dominating personality so enveloped her, that it was with scarcely a start of

say that one always returns, sooner or later, to the place where one has committed a crime, you know,—one cannot keep away, there is a fatal fascination about it, which draws one against one's will. I feel sometimes that I must have unconsciously committed some crime here,—I loathe Paris, and yet I return, always.”

“And Reba? I have heard nothing of her. Is she still eating little cakes?” she added mischievously. The Baron shrugged, with a slight deprecatory smile.

“I do not doubt it,” he responded. “But now the little cakes are decorated with coronets—tiny nine-pointed ones, in pink-and-white sugar.”

Mary looked the question she would not ask, and he elucidated, airily:

“Madame Reba preferred ducal *pâtisserie*—baked near royal kitchens,—to the modest but wholesome confections of our friend Colambin. But you, *p'tite amie*, where have your eager little feet taken you?”

“Oh, we've been all over,—England and Ireland, and the continent. We go back to Ireland for the Dublin horse show in August; and then home to America.”

“To—America!” he repeated in polite dismay. “So soon?”

“Yes, Frank must take the stable back.—Mr. Kyle has decided to race again at home.”

“But that is a great pity,—we shall all be desolated. And Monsieur Frank, how is he?”

“Oh, he's splendid.—I wonder if you've heard of the really wonderful success for our stable in England, and here at Auteuil? Frank says it is only luck, but Mr. Kyle is delighted, and lays it to Frank's care and training. But you? You have not been back to Russia, then?”

The Baron's face clouded suddenly and a look almost of anger passed over it. It was gone instantly, however, and he turned to her again with a smile.

"No. Not yet, Mademoiselle. I have — work to do, first."

His words were quiet enough, but something in his tone made the girl shiver, and she spoke hastily to cover her confusion.

"I met a Russian lady in London, during the winter. She was very dark, and slender, and beautiful, and lived all alone in a great house near the Queen's Mall. She wore queer wriggly dresses, and her fingers were always stained from cigarettes, and she had a coiled snake tattooed on her shoulder,—a cobra, ready to spring."

"And did she also have a black panther for a pet?" the Baron asked.

"You know her, then? Yes, she kept the panther in a cage in the garden. He was a huge, wicked-looking beast!"

"Olga Saranoff — in London!" he said slowly, as if to himself.

"Yes, but she's going back to Petersburg soon. She told me so."

"Poor Olga!" The Baron shrugged again. "She is always going back — soon! She has been waiting and hoping for ten years, but there are those at court who never forget and their memories live after them. She knows the fate she escaped,—the fate which awaits her, if she crosses the frontier."

Mary gave a low involuntary cry.

"Oh," she gasped. "What do you mean? What can she have done?"

"She had the misfortune, Mademoiselle, to be born

with great beauty, a proud rebellious heart, and a democratic spirit — three dangerous attributes at court. Enemies unwisely made, an indiscreet love affair,— it is an open secret that she raised her splendid eyes too near the throne,—and a still more indiscreet sympathy for a lost cause. That is Olga Saranoff's story in a nutshell. She — disappeared. There may be those —" a slight smile curved his bearded lips for a fleeting moment, "who know something of her escape from the fatherland. *Enfin*, she appeared on the continent. It is said, too, that the cobra which is so fantastically tattooed upon her shoulder conceals the scars of the knout."

"How — terrible!" Mary shuddered, and for a space neither spoke. Then the Baron broke the silence.

"But we must not be *triste*, now!" he exclaimed.

"We have so much to say to each other!"

"Have we?" Mary looked up at him with surprise at his suddenly intimate tone, not unmixed with a certain uneasiness.

"But, surely!" he went on. "I am dining to-night in the rue François Premier,—but perhaps you and Monsieur Frank will drop into Maxim's later?"

"I—I don't know. Perhaps." Mary's tone was vaguely doubtful.

As if to dispel any unfavorable impression his impetuosity might have created the Baron talked on lightly and easily until her equanimity was fully restored; but an hour later, as he placed her in a fiacre at the gate of the Tuileries, he said:

"If we do not meet to-night at Maxim's, Mademoiselle Marya, you — you will take your promenade here again to-morrow, is it not so?"

Mary laughed and shook her head as she drove off, but it was significant that she pleaded a headache when Frank suggested Maxim's after the revue at the Folies Marigny that evening, and for three days she carefully avoided the neighborhood of the Tuileries.

However, on the fourth day her unwilling feet carried her there it seemed, almost without her volition, and the Baron was awaiting her. He rallied her with playful reproaches for her capriciousness, then wisely dropped the personal element, and began anew the reminiscences of Russia which had so fascinated her, and chained her attention.

They met again, and yet again, and Mary at length made no attempt, even to herself, to keep up the farce that their frequent encounters were accidental. The man's knowledge of the world, the breadth of his experiences, the brilliancy of his mind, were the needed spurs to her growing mentality, the manna she craved. It was significant, too, that save on the first occasion of their meeting, she did not mention his name to Frank. She did not deliberately withhold it from any consciously deceptive thought, but from the uneasy feeling that she would not be able to make him understand. In her heart she felt that in these quiet hours in the garden of long-perished kings there was no disloyalty to the man who had been so good to her. The conversation between herself and the Baron would have bored Frank, had he been able to comprehend it, but to her it was as the opening of a marvellous book, and she grew to live for that morning hour more than she realized. Frank noticed the renewed lightness in her step, the quickening of the rose tint in her cheeks, the added brilliancy of her strange topaz eyes, and he concluded that France agreed with her better than England, after all.

As the days passed, a dim sense of contrition stirred within her, although she honestly felt she had committed no fault, and she tried to make amends by increased, spasmodic periods of tenderness. Frank was incredulously pleased at first, then slightly bewildered at her mercurial changes, but no doubt of her entered his head. He was full of plans for their home-going and for the work of the horses under his care during the coming season in America, and failed utterly to observe that Mary shared neither his interest nor his enthusiasm.

If the truth were told Mary was facing the return to America with unhappiness, and a fierce rebellion against her fate. She was not ungrateful to Frank, nor would she permit him to see her keen disappointment; but she was almost in despair. America held nothing for her. There was no one to welcome her but the Gattles, and long months ago her irregular correspondence with Mabel had ceased altogether. She had outgrown her friend as inevitably as she had outgrown Marcus and Frank in their turn. She felt as though many years had passed since she had sailed from New York; not a bare twelve-month. It seemed to her that all this time her eyes had been steadily, but very gradually opening, and that she was now only beginning to comprehend how much there was on every hand to learn. And she must leave it all, and turn her face westward, never, perhaps, to return. She had learned that she must accept the unexpected vicissitudes of the career she had chosen without question or complaint, as part of the game of life, but she had hoped against hope that Kyle would decide to keep his string in Europe for another year or two at least, in accordance with his original plan.

The Baron noticed her troubled abstraction, which

increased as the end of the racing season in France drew near, but if he guessed at the cause he shrewdly gave no sign. Instead, he coaxed her to make little pilgrimages with him to the historic places in and about Paris, telling her just enough of them to whet her desire for more. The Louvre, too, she revisited with him, until the masterpieces became as so many familiar friends, although she never lost that first reverential awe with which they had inspired her.

One never-to-be-forgotten day, near the end of her stay in Paris, the Baron persuaded her to go to Versailles, and the impression of its fairylike beauty remained poignant in her memory for very long. Frank had gone to the south of France to look over some promising young horses for Mr. Kyle, and Mary felt no qualm of conscience to mar her perfect day. The Baron was an irreproachable host, and subtly flattered her by his easy assumption of her intellectual equality, imparting information with the air of one discussing a well-known subject with a confrere. It was all the more flattering and stimulating, after the tolerance of Frank's tenderly amused petting, and Mary drank in eagerly all that he told her.

In the days which followed she lived over each of those short, magic hours,—and in consequence her dissatisfaction and unrest grew apace. She became listless and apathetic and her little fits of tenderness toward Frank seemed gradually to cease. When he informed her, with unusual abruptness, that they would leave Paris for London in two days, her impassive face betrayed no sign of the sudden sickening of her heart, and she set about her preparations for departure with outward equanimity. Her leavetaking with the Baron was casual, and on the surface was merely expressive of regret

at the temporary interruption of a pleasant friendship. Mary was inexpressibly relieved. She had shrunk from the announcement of her departure, she scarcely knew why, but it was accomplished in the easiest and most natural manner in the world, nor did she realize that the Baron's infinite tact aided materially in the accomplishment.

He dined with them on their last evening in Paris, and left them at the door of their hotel with candid, urbane regret, heartily shaking hands with the trainer, and kissing Mary's with debonair, old-world courtesy. But he smiled to himself as he strolled away through the warm fragrant night, and quite irrelevantly hummed the lilting waltz *motif* of an opera of the moment.

Mary and Frank spent the next month in almost continuous travel, and the end of August found them in Dublin. At first Mary had had a half presentiment that the Baron, who knew their itinerary, might appear suddenly from nowhere, and found herself more than once looking for him instinctively, but her half-acknowledged hope was disappointed and she came in time to regard the days of their acquaintance with a wistful regret, as of magic hours, never to be renewed.

The Dublin horse show was the most brilliant in recent years. The entry of a well-known Irish horseman had won the last Derby, and the characteristically volatile enthusiasm of the sporting world was aroused to a fever heat of interest. Mary was in her element, resolutely shutting her eyes to the unwelcome future, and abandoning herself gaily to the excitement of the moment. Frank's friends,—sporting, cleancut young Englishmen, for the most part,—were assiduous in their attentions, attracted as much by the curious combination of childish naïveté and worldly wisdom she dis-

played as by the strange charm of her delicate, flower-like face and leonine, inscrutable eyes. Her carefully studied manner was irreproachable, her gowns were masterpieces of the art of her modiste, and her appearance invariably created a ripple of attention. Frank was immensely proud of her; but of late his wistfulness had increased; he had grown more quiet and less demonstrative than ever, and his eyes rested moodily, forebodingly upon her.

On the second day of the horse show, as Mary languidly scrutinized the brilliant assemblage passing in review before her, she caught a glimpse of a tall arrogant figure which seemed, unbelievably, to be a familiar one. She caught her breath, leaning quickly from her box, her face alive with eager anticipation. At that instant Baron Iverskoi looked up and their eyes met.

In an incredibly short space of time he had made his way to her box, and over her hand was murmuring delighted surprise at the unexpected meeting. Momentarily left alone with her a little later, however, when her friends had gone to greet others of their acquaintance, he asked suddenly, in a low, vibrating tone:

"Did you not expect me, *p'tite amie*? Did you not know that I would come?"

"Why — I — no, Baron. I knew nothing of your plans —"

"But surely, you knew I must see you again, when I am so soon to lose you! I would not come before. The good Monsieur Frank would not have understood my presence, but now, when you are so soon to return to that huge far-off America —"

"Oh, why did you come!" cried the girl, discretion flung to the winds in her distress. "I sail next week.

This can only be — good-bye, and you make it harder for me to go!”

“Do I, *chérie de mon cœur!*” His hand gripped hers in a sudden access of passion, as it rested on her parasol and his eyes burned into her own. “Must it, then, be good-bye?”

The reappearance of her friends put an end to the scene, but Mary sat as in a dream, her brain awl with strange emotions and amid them a daring, maddeningly insistent thought.

The Baron was constantly in her train during the remainder of horse-show week. Frank accepted the fact of his reappearance with no show of surprise, but had Mary not been wholly engrossed in the tumult of her thoughts and emotions, she could not have helped but observe the change in his manner evoked by the Baron’s presence.

Mary was indeed in distress of mind. Aside from any material advantage, Baron Iverskoi’s undoubtedly brilliant intellectuality and suave knowledge of the world had fascinated her, and the vista his delicately suggested proposition opened before her was an intoxicating one. On the other hand, she detested the thought of returning to America, and Frank, whose taciturnity had at first interested her, now bored and irritated her to extinction.

Her gratitude to him had in no wise diminished, but she realized that if she was to win in the desperate fight for a foothold in the world, which she had undertaken against such odds, she must have the first consideration. She would be honest, she would not descend to trickery or deceit, on that she was determined. Frank should have no cause to accuse her of unfairness, of not playing the game, but her life was in her own

hands, to do with as she willed. She must decide her own future.

The week at Dublin over, Frank and Mary went to London, and the Baron, after a ceremonious farewell, returned to Paris. Frank had arranged to sail with Mr. Kyle and the string in a few days, and Mary was to follow on the next steamer. The last hours were far from happy ones. Mary made no effort to conceal her sudden constraint in Frank's presence, and in his turn he dropped all pretence of being oblivious to the change in her bearing to him, but watched her quietly, as if waiting for her to speak.

The last evening came, and Frank, who for the first time had gently refused her offer to help him, was finishing the trivialities of his packing, while Mary watched him moodily, a dread of the task before her mounting with each moment of silence between them. It was characteristic of her that no thought of evading the coming revelation entered her mind. She had no idea of sparing herself, of seeking an easier escape from the present situation than the obvious, straightforward course she had determined upon, but she shrank from inflicting sorrow on the man who had been uniformly kind to her, even while she realized its inevitability.

The minutes passed, and the tension became too great, the suspense unbearable. Suddenly, she caught her breath, and said as gently as she could:

"Frank, there's something I must tell you. I suppose I should have before; but I wasn't sure."

"Yes?" he responded, quietly. He finished strapping a bag as he spoke, and turning, faced her.

"I—I'm not going back to America."

There was a long pause, and Mary drew a deep breath. The plunge was over!

"What do you propose to do?" His tone was very grave, but without surprise. Mary gasped and looked at him curiously. Could he have suspected?

"I want to go back to Paris. I can't bear the thought of America — yet. There's so much I haven't seen, haven't learned, Frank,— so much! All this year, I've just been finding out how wonderful it all is, and that I don't know anything, anything at all! I've had an awfully good time, and been happy every minute, but I haven't learned what I want to. I can't go back now!"

"How do you expect to live?" His voice was calmly impersonal, but his face had whitened.

Mary bowed her head.

"Oh, I—I shall manage," she half whispered. Then she looked up bravely. "I cannot bear to hurt you, Frank, you have been so good to me! I shall always remember, and thank you, but—I have my own life to live. I must look out for myself. I feel as if I stood alone against all the world! I'm not ungrateful for all you have done for me, but I must do what I think is best."

"It is—the Baron?" The coolness of his voice maddened her.

"He—he has offered me his protection. But why do you ask me?— You don't seem a bit surprised, you act as if you expected it, as if you had known, all along!"

"I thought it would come in Paris, when you met him every day."

"You knew? But why didn't you speak? Why did you say nothing?"

"I could trust you. I knew you were square," he answered simply. "When he turned up in Dublin last

week I knew it was all over. He can do a lot more for you than I can of course; but you're such a little girl yet, in lots of ways — I hope he'll be good to you." His voice trembled.

"Oh, Frank!" Mary burst into shamed tears. "I feel like such a — a wretch, leaving you, you don't know! I'm a little afraid, too. I don't know what will become of me! But I've got to do what I can to help myself, I had to decide. I know you love me, now, but think of the future! Remember that poor girl on the steamer last year, Rhoda Dering? She gave the best years of her life to a man who loved her,— and he broke her heart!"

"Mary, you can't judge by her experience. She knew what the end might be, in the very beginning, but she deliberately shut her eyes, she told you so. She chose her life, and then hadn't the courage to pay the piper. It's different with us — you know, you must have known for months, that I would 've been glad to make you my wife. There will never be any one else but you, Mary.— But it's over now, my dear, and you must go your own way. I hope to God that you're not making any mistake,— that you'll be happy. You've got that address which will always reach me, and if you're ever in any trouble, or sick, or want anything, you'll write, won't you?"

Mary sobbed on, unrestrainedly. Relief that the worst was over mingled with her heartache for the misery she had inflicted on Frank, but she was beginning to realize what life would mean without the sure refuge of his love and protection, and she felt suddenly afraid.

"It is late, and you must rest." The man rose wearily as he spoke, and with a pang, she saw that he looked years older. "I'm glad you told me, little girl;

but I knew you would. You've always been honest. You couldn't be anything else. You've given me a year of happiness that I didn't believe would ever come to me. I — I shall be gone before you wake in the morning. Don't forget what I told you about letting me know if you ever want any help. And remember, Mary, you can always — come back to me. Whatever you do, whatever happens to you, you can always come back."

He came to her, and she threw herself suddenly, passionately into his arms, her sobs choking her. He held her close for an instant, then kissed her gravely and released her, and a moment later she heard the soft closing of his door.

CHAPTER IX

HUDDLED into a corner of her railway carriage the next day, Mary watched with tear-dimmed eyes the sodden green countryside slip past her rain-spattered window. Frank Kelly was well on his way to Liverpool, where the ship lay which was to take him forever out of her life, and Mary's heart sank anew at the thought of a future without him. In spite of his final generous kindly words, she knew in her heart that never could there be any turning back. No matter what misfortune or privation might come to her, she would never allow herself to appeal to the man she had deliberately discarded. She realized that her last glimpse of Frank's sorrowful face the evening before was indeed a final one, and the thought brought with it a throb of pain that she had never before known.

She tried vainly to think of the immediate future, and of Baron Iverskoi, impatiently awaiting her arrival in Paris, but she was too shaken, too overwrought with the strain of the last few days and the culminating scene, to be able to fix her thoughts with any degree of equanimity on what lay before her. She was exhausted, mentally and physically, with the storm and stress of her emotions, and felt as if the rushing train were hurrying her on without her own volition into the future.

Soothed, in spite of her overstrung nerves, by the monotonous rumble and sway of the railway carriage, she fell asleep and awakened only when Dover was reached. Unaccustomed to travelling alone, and still

half dazed, she stood helplessly on the platform looking about her, when two large gloved hands suddenly grasped hers, and a hearty voice sounded in her ears:

"Marya! *Chérie de mon cœur!* You have come!"

Marya's pulses gave a sudden leap, as she looked up into the Baron's eager face, and a quickening warmth and glow stole through her veins.

"Oh," she cried, breathlessly, "I am so glad you met me — half-way!"

"I should have come to that bleak, dismal London, and carried you off, my beautiful one, but that I desired you to come to me, alone, of your own free will. But behold my impatience! I could not wait, thinking of you while the hours crept by, and so I came."

On the little steamer he found a sheltered place for them on the narrow crowded deck, which she preferred to a stuffy stateroom,— and procured some tea. The fresh wind blowing full upon her, the scurry and bustle going on all about, and above all the reassurance of the Baron's presence revived her drooping spirits, and her optimistic buoyancy returned in some measure.

It was not until the short, tempestuous voyage was over, the customs ordeal at Calais gone through, and they were safely ensconced in their railway carriage en route for Paris that Baron Iverskoi asked the question uppermost in his mind.

"Monsieur Frank,— he sails to-day for America?"

Marya nodded slowly, a swift look of pain darkening her face.

"And you, *chérie*,— you found it difficult, the last interview? Foolish, quixotic little one! You should have waited, as I said, until he reached his journey's end, and then — a little letter would have explained, and all would have been finished."

whatever trick of expression or gesture she might acquire, whatever she might learn, to enable her to make herself one with the Baron's delightful world.

Mary had undergone as magical a change and development physically as she had mentally, since the half-forgotten day when she cast aside forever the bondage of the mills. The unconscious lithe grace of her figure remained, but without losing any of its girlish charm, it had rounded out into gracious curves, which gave assurance of a splendid maturity. Her childish face was untouched by any trace of her experiences, but softened and refined by an awakened intellectuality; and from her head to her feet she was an exquisite, finished product of unremitting care and faultless taste. Only her large knuckled hands and slightly spatulate fingertips hinted of the years of toil.

She had not ceased to be an omnivorous reader, and the Baron chose her books with infinite care. He never seemed to tire, too, of her unfailing interest in, and enthusiasm for historic relics and scenes, and together they explored Paris and its environs to her heart's content.

All in all, Mary's lines seemed to have fallen in pleasant places, and she was content to drift, unquestioningly, in the present. Baron Iverskoi gave her no intimation of his plans for the winter which was now close at hand, but the jewel-box of an establishment on the Avenue Wagram spelled permanency to Mary's mind, and she did not concern herself with the future.

She was astounded, therefore, when, one bleak afternoon in late November, as she lay on the couch in her boudoir, before a cheerily crackling fire on the ornate little hearth, the Baron entered and announced their immediate departure for Biarritz.

"Biarritz!" Mary repeated in surprise. "We are to leave Paris!"

"For a short time only. A mere matter of business, *chérie*. You have never been to Biarritz?"

"No, never —"

"Ah, but you will be enchanted! It is on the borderline of Spain, you know, on the sea, and there is sunshine and roses everywhere, not like this chill, frowning, angry mood Paris is in! San Sebastian is but twenty miles away — we will go there to see the bullfight, and you shall have a mantilla more beautiful than La Belle Otero's!"

"It — it must be lovely!" Mary exclaimed, cloaking her secret reluctance at his precipitate announcement. "When do we go, Georges?"

"To-morrow. Ring for your maid, and tell her to pack some bags and light luggage, sufficient for your toilette for several days,— and bring also your jewels, Marya. Louisette and my man will follow later."

Mary stood for a long moment where he had left her, as if turned to stone. A vague but dominant foreboding prevailed her confused thoughts, that this sudden move marked the termination of her life of these three wonderful months. There had been no tangible reason for such a conclusion in the Baron's words or manner, but she felt it, instinctively. With an effort she threw off her troubled thoughts, summoned her maid, and began preparations for her departure. A revelation of thought came to her, and as she sat in the dismantled confusion of her boudoir, a sense of unreality enveloped her — she felt all at once as if she were in a dream, and would awake presently, there on her silken couch, and life would go on as before.

Not until the following day when she found herself

speeding southwestward on a fast train did perfect realization come to her. The Baron seemed to be subtly aware of her carefully concealed disappointment and dismay, and he tried to distract her thoughts with a glowing, artfully described account of the beauties and fascination of Biarritz, to which she gave an outwardly pleased and interested attention, but her thoughts were back in the charming little home she had left. Would she ever cross the threshold again?

The country through which they rolled was flat, and grey, and bared to the sweeping winds. The pert smiling warmth and verdancy of the summer had given place to a sombre, stolid gloom. The little farms huddled under their over-hanging, thatched roofs looked cheerless, and forlorn, and as far as the eye could see, stretched a countryside seemingly dismal, poverty-ridden, and sunk in hopeless desuetude.

Keyed-up as she was by the confusion of the last day, Mary finally slept through long hours, and awakened to a miraculous change of scene. The depressing wintry atmosphere had undergone a metamorphosis into the warmth and sunshine and radiant greenness of the glorious southland, and exclamations of rapture and delight fell unbidden from her lips. She took heart again, and her mercurial spirits rose.

After a long interval they reached Biarritz and were ensconced in a luxurious apartment in the huge bustling hotel. The long French windows of their drawing-room opened upon a tiny balcony which overlooked the gaily thronged plage and the blue waters of the Bay of Biscay, and Mary loved to sit there and watch the sunset fade into rosy-tinted twilight, and darkness descend upon them like a soft, grey veil. She was enchanted with the beauty of the scene about her, and the joyous

pleasure-loving, care-free atmosphere intoxicated her, but her thoughts still returned, in spite of her distractions of the moment, to her Paris home, and many were her anxious thoughts concerning it.

Two days after their arrival, they were joined by Stepan, the Baron's valet, and Mary's fears anent her little establishment seemed to have been well founded, for Stepan brought with him a pile of trunks containing their entire wardrobes, and most of her own personal belongings. The Baron procured a new maid for her, a young Spanish woman named Nina, to replace Louisette, whom Stepan averred was unwilling to leave Paris.

Mary was dejected, but she did not voice her disappointment. She had deliberately chosen her path, and placed herself in the Baron's hands. She must abide by his decisions, and adapt herself to the uncertainty of his mode of life.

He made no further pretext of business affairs having brought him to Biarritz, and gave himself up to a thorough enjoyment of the life there. Since the beginning of her friendship with him she had seen but one side of his character,—suave, unfailingly courteous and considerate, and revealing rare depths of sympathy and understanding. She had taken for granted, after these months of the closest association with him, that she understood his complex nature as well as any one would ever have knowledge of it, but an incident occurred which threw a new and illuminating side-light upon his character, and left Mary disturbed and vaguely terrified.

They crossed the frontier to San Sebastian, as the Baron had promised, to see the bull-fight. Mary had looked forward to it with keen enjoyment, but the reality filled her with loathing. The amphitheatre, the

sea of eager faces and masses of vivid color interested her at first, but when the arena claimed her attention, and the wholesale slaughter of horses by the maddened bull began, her face blanched, and she strove to tear her eyes away from the brutal sight, but sheer horror held them fast. At length, the climax of the bestial orgy came, and the great bull sank to his knees beneath the death-stab, quivered for an instant with glazing eyes and reddened horns lowered, and then lay prone. The resplendent espada bowed sweepingly, pandemonium broke loose, and the amphitheatre was suddenly transformed into an inferno of howling, shouting people drunk with the lust of blood. Mary looked about her at the wildly applauding multitude, at their wolfish faces and glittering eyes, and sick with pity at the wanton cruelty of the scene before her unaccustomed eyes, and rage and disgust as well, she turned to the Baron — and shrank suddenly away from him.

He was sitting immovably by her side, taking no part in the half-savage riot of applause going on all about him, but his hands were clenched, as if his iron control of himself was sustained only with superhuman effort. The cords swelled out upon his neck and temples, and on his bloodless face was a look of such fiendish and insensate brutality that he seemed transformed suddenly into a changed being,— a reversion perhaps to the primitive emotions of his slavic ancestry, long hidden beneath the cloak of conventional every-day life. To Mary, the revelation of innate savagery, of barbarous, exultant cruelty, was revolting and terrifying, and for the first time she began dimly to realize the possibilities which lay beneath the well-poised surface suavity of his manner.

What depths of hatred and appetite for revenge

might lurk in the recesses of his strange, repressed nature! Should his passion for her endure, she would find it a far different matter to break with him, than from the indifferent Marcus and generous Frank Kelly. She was utterly alone, and in the hollow of this man's hand,—this man who was after all the veriest stranger to her, whose capacity for violence she had never conceived. A wave of sickening physical fear engulfed her at the realization of her helplessness.

At her shrinking horrified gaze the Baron recalled himself, and the familiar mask of control swept over his face, obliterating the lines of malevolence which had tensed it beyond semblance to the man she thought she had known. Only in his eyes the fire died slowly, and as if aware of this, he turned his face from her.

Once more in the clear dazzling sunshine of the white-paved little street, with the howling, acclaiming crowd shut away from their actual vision, she strove to speak naturally, but it was with only the most supreme effort that she succeeded in part. She felt a mad desire to shriek aloud and to run as fast and far as she could,—to run until she dropped, until she could put from her thoughts forever the horror of that scene.

The Baron was quite himself again,—calm, suave, cynically amused at her shocked repulsion, her gauche intolerance of the national sport. He even rallied her good-humoredly on what he called her “American point of view,” and she replied spiritedly, the half-jesting little tilt giving her time to regain her self-possession and marshal her wits; but the sensation of horror and revulsion was ineradicable.

During the rest of their stay at Biarritz, Baron Iverskoi proposed no more bull-fights, and that afternoon at San Sebastian was, to all outward appearances, for-

gotten, but the seed had been sown, and Mary never looked upon his face without seeming to see it again as it was when the gory carcass of the bull lay quivering before him, and his savage soul exulted. Her repulsion and fear of him grew rather than diminished as the weeks passed, although he gave no slightest expression of the passions he had for one instant revealed. Her inconsequent happiness, her light-hearted, half-defiant enjoyment of the present had vanished, and even the jewels he had lavished upon her, which had made Frank's gifts seem tawdry in comparison, and the knowledge of the growing bank account, for which she schemed and saved with an obsession of miserliness, to the end of her intimate independence, could bring little peace to her mind. She faced the difficulties of her position, as dauntlessly as she had faced every obstacle which had arisen between her and her determined goal, and combatted her scarcely tangible fears, but if dormant, they were not exorcised.

After a few weeks they proceeded to Rome, where the Baron found an apartment for her in a sombre but picturesque old house, once the palazzo of a long-forgotten noble, and there more friends of the Baron appeared.

Soon they had a group about them much as in Paris, and now and then one or another of those who had frequented the little establishment on the Avenue Wagram came, but none in whom Mary had felt even a passing interest. She found her greatest delight in exploring the cathedrals and ruins, and wandering endlessly through the picture galleries and museums, frequently by herself, for here in Rome the Baron was more occupied than in Paris, and evinced less desire to act as her guide. He seemed satisfied to have her

the chatelaine of his establishment and his acknowledged mistress, proud of her beauty and charm, and the success she so easily and unconsciously attained among his friends.

Late winter found them at Monte Carlo, and here an incident occurred, the possibility of which, once confidently anticipated, had long since passed from her mind.

It had been a perfect day, almost cloying in its heavy fragrance and unstirred warmth, and night had fallen suddenly, like a sable, star-spangled mantle of velvet.

The Casino was ablaze with myriads of lights which scintillated on the jewels and bare, softly gleaming shoulders of the women, and brought out sharply the tense faces of the men about the tables. Mary stood beside the Baron and some acquaintances of his, idly watching the play and glancing from one to another of the varied expressions of those who watched so raptly the turning of the wheel.

In the days of her association with Frank Kelly she had loved racing for its own sake, as a clean sport. The gambling fever, the love of chance had never gotten into her blood. The eagerness with which these people sought for places, the fascination of the long, green-clothed tables, was incomprehensible to her, the croupier's voice sounded monotonously in her ears, and the closeness of the pungently-scented atmosphere oppressed her. She longed for the cool fragrance of the night air, and wished devoutly that the Baron's run of luck would change and he would cease play for that evening, when all at once a curious sensation stole over her, a vivid impression that some one was watching her, that familiar eyes were gazing upon her and seeking, willy-nilly, to meet her own.

She raised her head at last and looked full into a face across the table; and suddenly, unaccountably her heart-beats quickened. The face upon which she gazed was smooth-shaven, with clear-cut features and the broad red weal of a scar across one cheek-bone. The eyes which met hers were keen and cool and grey, their expression not now an indifferent one, but quickened with interest and recognition.

m It was the face she had half-unconsciously sought at Saratoga, and at Auteuil, and Longchamps, and Epsom,—the face of the unknown man who had made so deep an impression upon her at Sheepshead that memorable day when Frank Kelly had come to her. She had not forgotten it, although nearly two years had passed, and she read in the eyes across the table that he knew the recognition was mutual. The look was as impersonal as ever, but the same indefinable sensation took possession of her as at their previous meeting,—that somewhere, some time, the stranger would enter her life.

She turned away, and fixed her eyes resolutely on the Baron's impassive face; and when, in spite of herself, her glance strayed back to where the other had been but a moment before, his chair was occupied by a newcomer, and he had vanished in the crowd.

CHAPTER X

THE months sped by, and summer came and passed swiftly; then the winter and summer of another year. They had gone from Monte Carlo to Paris, and had made the usual round of Aix, and Trouville, and Ostend, and Scheveningen. The winter was varied by Egypt, St. Moritz and the Riviera, but spring and summer brought again Paris and the watering places. Wherever they settled themselves for a few weeks the Baron found friends, and the constant association with their varied types taught Mary much that she could not otherwise have learned. Her knowledge of human nature was becoming a quick and sure asset — only the Baron remained ever an enigma to her. At times mad with passion for her, as when at first they were together, at others indifferent to her presence for days at a time, lost in deep and seemingly troublous thought, from which he would rouse himself as if awakening from an unpleasant dream and turn to her with redoubled ardor. After two years with him, his life was still a sealed book to her. Of his position in Russia, of his people and affiliations she had learned nothing — he had never spoken so freely of his country even as on that first day long ago in the gardens of the Tuileries, and his personal affairs were never mentioned. His life was that of an idler, loitering from one fashionable resort to another, consorting with those who lived as seemingly aimless and care-free an existence as he.

He was as silent in regard to the future as he had been about the past, but he was restless and never content for long, hurrying on from place to place as soon as the attractions of each began to pall upon him. From what knowledge she had been able to glean of his character, Mary realized that this wandering existence was but a period of waiting, an interval in his scheme of life which he was seeking to while away with such distractions as he might, and that she herself was but a means at hand,—a pretty and amusing woman, who satisfied his animal nature, and whom he had moulded into a suitable hostess for his temporary establishments, and a pleasing companion for the moment, nothing more; a toy, a plaything to be thrown aside when the more serious issues of life presented themselves. The feeling was borne in upon her increasingly, as time passed, that he had a definite purpose, a fixed aim and desire for the future, and that in that future she would have no part. She had never sought to deceive herself; the Baron's infatuation for her had been solely of the senses, and only the infinite variety of her nature, her understanding of his moods, and her developing tact had held him at her side. On her part, her feeling for him was vague and not to be defined even to herself. Certainly she had no love for him; the zenith of his passion had awakened no answering spark within her. He had interested her from the first, she had grown accustomed to his presence, to a close association with him, that was all. She had never quite lost the physical fear of him engendered by that unforgotten day at San Sebastian, although never since had the mask which concealed the depths of his inmost nature been swept aside.

Now and then, in a pause in her migratory existence, she had a vague longing for America, although there

was no definite appeal from her own land, no lingering tender memories to call her back. No lasting friendship, even, remained. Her correspondence with Joe Gattles' genial wife had died of inanition long before, and although she had hoped for a letter,—she would have welcomed even a reproachful one,—when Mabel learned of her parting with Frank Kelly, no word had come to her.

Mary had been with the Baron a little over two years, and the beginning of winter found them lingering longer than usual in Paris. In the last few weeks, the Baron's manner had undergone a change she could not but notice and take into account. He was as kind and courteous as ever, but he had protracted periods of preoccupation, broken by sudden transports of passionate tenderness toward her, in which there seemed mingled an undefinable contrition and regret. His habits, too, had changed. He absented himself more and more frequently, made no effort to gather his former friends about him as before, and more than once he was visited by very grave, distinguished-looking personages, evidently countrymen of his, whom Mary had never seen before, and with whom he was closeted for long hours. The girl felt instinctively that a crisis of some sort was approaching in their mutual affairs, and the value of some really superb jewels he had lately given her only seemed to confirm her suspicions.

When December came, however, he announced their immediate departure for Rome, and Mary made her preparations in a bewilderment not unmixed with perturbation. The Baron's usual sangfroid had given place to an exuberant excitement and joy which, while he made no explanation of it, he did not attempt to conceal. He was as one from whom a cloud had been

lifted, to whom had come victory after a long-sustained siege.

On arriving in Rome, they took a suite in an English hotel instead of establishing themselves in an apartment as heretofore — evidence to Mary's mind that their stay was to be but a brief one — and here day after day he left her alone while he went about some mysterious business of his own.

One evening, about a week after their arrival, he entered her boudoir as Nina was putting the finishing touches to her mistress's toilette for dinner, and at the first glimpse of his face, Mary realized that something momentous had occurred, that the feverish suspense, the underlying strain of the past few weeks, was at an end; and some ultimate, long-desired aim achieved. His face was grave and calm, with a tranquillity strangely incompatible with the excitement and unrest which had gone before, but his eyes glowed darkly with a triumphant exultation too deep for mere surface expression, a joy almost solemn in its intensity.

Mary felt an odd inexplicable sensation of relief stealing over her. The nervous strain had been greater on her than she had known, and she welcomed a termination of the uncertainty and suspense, whatever it might result in.

She greeted him quietly, and pinned on her breast with a steady hand the roses he had brought her. She felt tranquil and at peace, and awaited without trepidation the disclosure she knew instinctively to be forthcoming.

The dinner, which Baron Iverskoi ordered with especial care and deliberation, was an unusually silent one. There was a significant tenseness in the at-

mosphere which neither he nor she attempted to evade nor sought to exorcise. The Baron made scant pretence of dining but sat with his eyes fixed unwaveringly on Mary, feasting upon the flame-gold glory of her hair and the perfect contour of her slender snowy shoulders rising from the foamy lace of her gown; drinking in the exquisite youth, and freshness, and beauty of her, as if he beheld her for the first time,—or the last.

Later they went out upon the little balcony overlooking the square, and there they sat for a long hour in silence, their coffee and liqueurs untouched on the little table between them. Mary waited, gazing up at the velvety, star-encrusted darkness, her thoughts travelling idly back over the years of her association with the man beside her. The Baron smoked cigarette after cigarette, and his eyes wandered reflectively over the shadowed, almost deserted square below. He seemed to be studying himself and the situation, choosing his words and preparing with infinite care for the moment at hand.

Finally, he leaned over the railing and with a definite gesture tossed away a half-smoked cigarette. Mary bent forward, too, and watched the tiny spark of light whirling and writhing in its swift descent until it reached the pavement, where it glowered resentfully for a moment, and then suddenly vanished. With a half-smile upon her lips she turned to meet the Baron's eyes.

"You are silent to-night, my little one," he said, breaking the silence at last.

"And you, Georges?" she asked quietly, meeting his implied question with an open one.

"I have been — reflecting." He leaned toward her. "Tell me, Mary you are happy? I have made you — content?"

"Can you ask?" she cried, surprised at his mode of attack. "Ah, Georges, you know how happy I have been every day — every hour! What makes you think that there could be any doubt of that? You are strange, to-night."

"Am I, *chérie*?" He was watching her gravely, steadily. "Tell me, you do not regret your decision in London two years ago,— you are not sorry you left Monsieur — what was his name? — Monsieur Kellee, and came to me?"

"Regret? Of course not, Georges, not for a moment, ever! You have kept your word to me — do you remember that first day, on the way to Paris? You said you would teach me how to live, teach me what life meant. And you have!"

"But I have not kept all my word to you,— do you remember more, Marya? I vowed that your heart would awaken for me, but that was not to be."

"Georges —" she remonstrated, but before the power of his eyes she fell silent.

"I know that it is so. Your heart sleeps, and I have been able to teach you love no more than the rest. Some day you shall know it, you cannot escape. You have the body of a Thais, made for love,— the soul must be there, within you, it must some day burst into flame! But not for me, *chérie*. I do not blame or censure you, you gave me freely all I asked of you but love, and that cannot be given at my bidding. I am content that I have made you happy, that you do not regret. You are sure that whatever happens in the future, whatever changes should come,— if I should go away

and never return and you should see me no more, still you would not regret these last two years?"

His tone was low, and he spoke slowly and very distinctly, each word fraught with a meaning Mary could not have ignored if she would.

There was a slight pause, and then she replied evenly, in a tone which equalled the gravity of his own:

"No, Georges. Whatever the future brings to me, I shall never regret an hour of the two years we've spent together. You must always remember, when you think of me, that you've made me very happy. And when you leave me — for that is what you mean, isn't it? — When you leave me, I shall only think of you with gratitude for all you have done for me."

"Beloved of my heart!" there were tears in his voice now, and in his eyes. "I thought to teach you, but you have taught me more than you have learned. I have known many women, of many countries and kinds, and all have been the same in the end. But you — you are different from the rest. I knew it when first I saw you. Never have I thought again to know a woman such as you! — Marya, there is much I have never told you. You have asked me nothing, you are never curious, and I have not told you of myself, of my affairs, but now there is need."

"I didn't wish to know more than you chose to tell," she returned. "You, too, asked me no questions about the past, about what came before —"

"I had no right," he interrupted her with quiet firmness. "What had happened in the past was nothing to me, I was content to take you as you were. But oh, most incomprehensible of women, I was curious about you! You were not as other women living your life, — you came to me without love, but you were not

mercenary, rapacious,—deceitful, and lying, and false! You asked nothing of me, or of the future. You were docile, complacent, and ever kind, and seemed content to drift on always, without question. And I ask myself why — why? ”

“ You gave me everything, there was nothing left for me to desire, to ask of you.” She paused and then went on slowly. “ But of the future I ask — much.”

He started, and looked curiously, keenly at her, but she continued as if she had not noticed, her eyes staring straight before her into the unfathomable night. “ I ask for what I believe is the birthright of every human being — a chance to live! Not to exist like an animal grovelling, fighting for food and shelter, but to live, and grow, and expand, to develop everything that is in me, to know every phase of life! I don’t know how to express what I mean, I’ve never spoken of it to any one before, in all the world. No one but you could have understood. I love life so, and everything it brings with it; everything it means! No matter how unhappy I may be, how I shall suffer, I shall never, never want to die, to put life away from me, to leave so much unknown, untasted, undone! I — I’m not going into details, which would only offend your senses, Georges. My home in the beginning was honest, but it wasn’t like anything you can conceive of, anything you have ever experienced. It is enough to tell you that I have known what it is to toil until I dropped,—to be starved, and cold, and beaten until my bones were broken! ”

He gave a sharp exclamation of pity, but she went on, as if she had not heard:

“ My hands, which you have covered with these beautiful rings,—have you ever really looked at them?

See how misshapen they are! No amount of massage and care can ever make them perfect again. They tell their own story of the years of hideous, grinding toil. And I feel sometimes that my heart is like them, too — my heart which you say is asleep. I don't love you, Georges, or any one,—not in the way you mean. I am sorry, but it is true. I wish I could have loved you, in return for all you have done for me. I don't think I shall ever care for any one. Love, as I've seen it, seems to be all giving, and I—I want to take! My heart is not asleep, but there is not room in it for love,—that would be the greatest misfortune that could come to me! It is still too full of bitterness for those awful years of misery and wretchedness. It wasn't so much the labor that was sapping my strength, or the privation and abuse, that I minded, I had never known anything else. It was the big world all about me, which I could never know; and life—life! And all at once my eyes were opened, and the realization came over me that soon I wouldn't care, that I would accept the hopelessness of trying to reach out for bigger things, for anything better than the life of the people around me,—that I would be contented to go on just as I was, until I died, and everything was ended forever, if I didn't strike out for myself. There was only one way I could help myself,—and I took that way. Now, can you understand?"

Baron Iverskoi nodded dumbly, his eyes never leaving her face. After a time she spoke again, but in an altered tone.

"That is all. I didn't have silly visions of being beautiful, or powerful, or fabulously rich, or meeting a fairy prince, like other young girls. I wanted to go out in the world and see and know everything I

could, and then to have a little home of my own somewhere, and be able to live my own life, free, and independent of every one on earth. I think it is the right of every one alive, to make of themselves what they are capable of being, to live according to their own ideas of happiness. I think that is what life really means. I don't want to go through the world leaving everybody who comes in contact with me the worse for my existence. Most women who choose the life I've chosen are destroyers. They either start out in a spirit of revenge because fate and some man have used them badly, or else they've had to go into it for the means to exist, and are bitter because, like me, they had no other chance, and it is too late to turn back. I meant to be honest and fair, always, not to harm any one, or cause a heartache to man or woman, but to find and keep my own happiness. I don't know why I have talked so much to you to-night about this, Georges, I never thought of telling any one,— somehow it isn't a thing one can explain very well in words. I'm not saying what I want to say at all; it doesn't express half of what I feel. You were curious, though, and I wanted you to know.— I wanted to justify myself, to explain myself to you, if I could; if there's any justification for a woman who gives herself to a man without loving him. I think there is,—I think if a woman plays fair, doesn't tread another woman beneath her feet, or ruin a man or drag him down,— that if her ideals for herself are high, the end justifies any means. I suppose all that sounds selfish and heartless,— but all the rest of the world is selfish, too. No one gives for the sheer love of giving,— no one gives unless they receive something tangible or intangible in return. The world calls people unselfish who are

happy in giving. The truth seems to me to be that they are so constituted, without their own volition, that they find their happiness in generosity, in self-denial and sacrifice. And they give in order to obtain that sensation of happiness,—they give, primarily, to be happy themselves, in their way. They are the saints and martyrs of the world, and yet they are merely seeking their own happiness,—just as is the untaught boy who tortures an animal smaller than himself, or the financier who rises to the crest of fortune on the ruin of other men, or the prostitute who wrecks the homes of sheltered, more guarded women,—only in a different way.”

Her voice ceased and there was a long silence. When he spoke, his firm ringing tones were hushed and shaken, and he seemed dazed, as one awakening.

“I do understand, Marya. I begin to comprehend. Are you a woman or a witch, that you see so deeply, so far beneath the surface of things? I thought that yours was the mind of a child,—that I could teach you, you who know all things!— But I am dense and stupid. You did not love me, you were under the protection and care of one you trusted, you were happy,—why then did you come to me?”

“Because,” Mary’s face went white at the brutality of the words she must utter, but she held her head up-raised, and her voice did not falter, “because you could give me more than Frank Kelly,—your knowledge was greater than his, I had learned all that he could teach me. He was returning to America, and if I stayed with him I should have been obliged to give up, perhaps forever, all hope of seeing and knowing about the wonderful places I had only caught maddening glimpses of. He had no knowledge or interest beyond his horses

and what he called a good time,— and to make every one happy around him —”

“But surely that is a great interest, *chérie*,— to make every one happy around him,” he interrupted, softly. “God Himself could wish to do no more.”

“Ah, but happy in his own way! He didn’t care about anything outside of his own life,— he didn’t know. And I—I was just beginning to realize how ignorant I was, and it made me unhappy, it was unendurable. I liked you, you interested me, I longed to know what you had stored in your mind, to make your knowledge mine. If you had not been able to give me material things, too, I should never have come to you, for the luxuries Frank had given me had become necessities, and if you or some one else had not come into my life, I suppose I should have gone back to America with him. I knew him thoroughly, and that I could depend absolutely on him, but I felt that I could trust you, too, and if I could not—well, I had prepared myself to risk the dangers of the path I’d chosen. I suppose it seems gauche and crude and vulgar of me to talk in this way to you, Georges, to tell you the naked truth, without any polite fibs or protestations or mental reservations, but I feel as if I was face to face with you for the first time in all my life.”

“I quite comprehend,” he responded, quietly. “I am glad that you have spoken so to me to-night, Marya,— I am glad that you have told me what was in your heart, for there is much that I must tell you, and now I am more sure that you will understand. It has been a great joy to me, these two years with you. I thought to find in you a pretty doll, a naively amusing companion, and all at once I find a woman, a real

woman, with more than a woman's mind. And I find you — too late."

"Too late?" She found herself repeating after him, dully. It had come, then. This was to be the end.

"Marya, listen to me!" He spoke quickly, feverishly, as if glad that the repression of the last few weeks was at last to find vent. "*Chérie de mon cœur*, perhaps I have not been fair to you,— I should, it may be, have told you of this before, have prepared you, but my whole life has bred secrecy, and one terrible lesson taught me to place my confidence in no one. Not that I did not trust you, but from long custom I have kept silent. I would selfishly have made you love me, if I could, but it is better, now, that love for me does not exist in your heart, for you will not suffer. You are too sensible, I know, not to have realized from the beginning of our — friendship — that it would not last forever. Not that I should tire,— men do not tire of women like you!— but in a ménage founded upon the shifting sands of propinquity and convenience there is no permanency."

He paused, and Mary found her voice.

"Yes, Georges, of course I knew that, always." Her tones were cool and sweet and perfectly steady. "What is it you are trying to tell me?"

"That it has come for us, my beautiful one,— the parting of our ways. I am called back, at last, to my country, to take up my life again, and you — you may not follow. I am desolated! The thought of the future without you, my arms empty of you — it is not to be endured! And that other men may come into your life, other men may be to you what I have been,—

ar-r-gh, I could kill them, and you, with my bare hands!" His tones vibrated with passion and into his eyes crept a look which the girl had seen once before — the gloating, savage, bloodlust of that day long ago at San Sebastian. Her own eyes dilated with a creeping fear of him, and as if subconsciously aware, in the heat of his ferocious intensity, of her sudden shrinking from him, the lines of his face smoothed out as if by magic, and a whimsical but saddened look displaced the malign fire in his eyes. His hand closed gently, reassuringly, over her closed one.

"But I, too, must be reasonable. I can have no future part in your life, my dear one. I know that I have no right to decree how it shall be spent.— You remember that first day, our talk together in the garden of the Tuileries? Ah, I know you do, you forget nothing! I told you then something of my country, my Russia, and how we, her loyal sons, feel toward her. I was — I am, of position in Petersburg, of influence in august circles, because of my birth, you comprehend. Years ago,— long years which I cannot look back upon without pain,— because of youthful impetuosity and mistaken zeal, I committed a great breach, a gross error in diplomacy, which might have caused international complications. All would, however, have been well, but because of the influence of a beautiful, passionate face I gave my confidence,— and the confidence was misplaced. Therefore I was banished, and because of the enormity of my offence, only my birth saved me from a far worse fate. All these weary years I have wandered restlessly over Europe, longing, hoping, praying that the intercession of my friends would sometime avail that I might be permitted to return, to

take up my work again,—to live, once more. Sometimes I despaired,—and they were bitter hours,—then I tried to forget. And then the old mad longing would return again, tearing at my soul! But you shall not be made to live over again with me the sorrow of this time. I have paid bitterly for my folly, and now the paying is done, and at last I may return to my own,—at last!” His eyes kindled again, but this time with a soft, reverential glow, and for the moment the girl at his side seemed to have been forgotten. “Weeks ago I learned that my plea was being agitated, that this time there was reason for hope that my friends would be successful! Figure to yourself, if you can, my suspense, my agony of hope and fear,—at one instant buoyed up with faith and confidence in the future, at the next sunk in the depths of hideous despair. But to-day came the gracious pardon, the august recall, and now I go once more to my own. And all at once, I find that though my soul is on fire with the victory, the reward for which I have prayed and struggled so long, still must I leave my heart behind me, and my joy is turned to sadness because I must leave you.”

Mary sat silent for a long time, staring out into the darkness. She found that after all she had not prepared herself for this, that the end had come stealing upon her almost unawares, and she faced chaos. One fact, only, stood out firmly in the whirlpool of her thoughts,—she must not fail herself now. She must show this man that she was mistress of this situation, as she meant to be mistress of her destiny,—he must not find that his judgment had been at fault, and her own valuation of herself too exalted. Bereft as his precipitate disclosure had left her of all coherent

thought for the immediate future, he should find her no weakling,—he should never know. She half-turned in her chair and covered his hand with her free one.

“Georges,” she began, and she wondered at the evenness of her tones. “I am glad, really glad for you. That is your rightful place; back in your country with your people. You will soon forget me — Ah, yes!” as he strove to interrupt her with a gesture of denial. “And it’s better so. I will be just a — a phase of a sort of dream, after a little. Of course, as you say, this could not have lasted in any case, and it’s so much better to have the end come now, before you are really tired of me, before you are bored to death, and unpleasant tiresome scenes would come to stay in your thoughts and spoil your memory of our happy times together. For we have been happy,—or at least you’ve been amused, diverted, but your real happiness lies there, at home. I’ve realized that for a long, long time.”

“But you? You must live,—what will become of you? It is that thought which drives me mad,—you are brave, and clever, and have much of common sense, I know. But — Dieu! — you are so young, and so beautiful, and alone!”

“I shall care for myself, Georges, just as I always have. You must have no anxiety on my account. I — I have no fears of the future.” Was it, could it be her own voice speaking so clearly, so confidently?

“As to your material needs, there is in your bank in Paris a settlement for you — but I cannot bear to speak of such things to you, now! If I could only take you with me — but I must return as I came, alone. I wonder, Marya, if you sometimes have guessed,—there is a wife, there in Petersburg, a proud, cold

woman whose heart such as it is, is filled only with pride of place and birth. She turned from me in my hour of disgrace, but now she condescends to receive me, and I must take my place again at her side. But my heart shall be with you. Always, Marya — always it shall cry out for you, and none may enter where you have been! My love! My love!”

He knelt suddenly beside her chair and kissed her small hands passionately. Then he bent his face upon them and she felt his slow, hot tears between her fingers.

Three days later Mary found herself alone with Nina speeding Parisward upon the midnight express.

CHAPTER XI

IN a small but exclusive hotel on the rue Cambon, Mary installed herself and Nina, and for a time kept to her apartments. Her sensations were curious ones, and she had to accustom herself to them. She felt as if she were some one else; as if it were some stranger who looked into her eyes in the rose-wood panelled mirror in her drawing-room. A few days ago, she had been leading an idle, luxurious existence with no thought for the morrow, lulled to a soporific sense of security by the even tenor of the months which had gone before, with only the slight shadow of uncertainty occasioned by Baron Iverskoi's repressed manner to disturb her equanimity, and presage — had she been more acutely intuitive,— the end. Now she was suddenly abandoned to her own devices, thrust out upon the world with only herself to depend upon, with no living soul to look to, should black misfortune and disaster assail her.

She was not utterly dismayed, at the sudden turn of events, nor did she weakly surrender to the helpless uncertainty and fear of the future which menaced her. Strong and determined beyond her years, as she was in some phases of her character, she was curiously child-like and unsophisticated in others, lacking the perfect self-assurance and self faith which is born only of long and widely varied experience.

Her star had so far in her venturesome journey,

been in the ascendent,—but if fortune failed her, if trouble and illness came, and the generous settlement which the Baron had made upon her, together with the money which she had so zealously hoarded, should be dissipated, and no new friend appeared upon the horizon, what resources had she to fall back upon?

After several days spent in vain musing on the problem of her future, the optimistic practical side of her nature reasserted itself, and she determined that she must go boldly forth and meet half-way whatever the future might have in store for her; not seclude herself and wait, cowed and trembling in spirit, for the inevitable. Her temperament was too mercurial, she was too thoroughly healthy and normally poised a young woman to suffer long under any chance blow of fate, in morbid nervous depression.

She had heard casually, sometime during the previous summer, that Paula Gallatin, a girl whom she had known in the days of her association with Frank Kelly, was living in an apartment on the rue Prouse. She remembered her as a vivacious shallow-brained little creature of casual loves, warm-hearted but heedless and devil-may-care; at once superficially clever, and improvidently impulsive.

In her need of human companionship Mary's thoughts turned to the gay, inconsequent bit of flotsam, and one afternoon she set forth in the dazzling winter sunshine to find her.

The apartment at the address given her was small, but luxuriously appointed, and the diminutive drawing-room into which Mary was ushered, bore evidence, in its rich but austere simplicity and artistic harmony, of the sure touch of a connoisseur's discriminative hand. Paula left to herself, would have overdone it, inevitably,

with glaringly discordant blotches of color, and ridiculous incongruities. The room did not in any way reflect the character of her hostess, as Mary had conceived it, and she wondered.

The tempestuous whirlwind entrance of Paula put an end to her musing, and she submitted to the impetuous caresses lavished upon her, waiting patiently until the rapid patter of welcome should cease momentarily from sheer lack of breath. She had known Paula Gallatin as she had known many other women of her mode of life, familiarly, but not intimately, and she had never been sufficiently attracted or interested by her volatile butterfly personality to seek a friendship with her; but now in her loneliness and solitude, her heart warmed to the evident sincerity of her joyous welcome.

"It's ages,—perfect centuries since I've seen you, Mazie!" Paula plumped down beside her, holding both her hands tightly. The name which had been Frank's favorite for Mary fell unconsciously from her lips. "Where on earth have you been all this time? It's lovely to see you again — I'm ever so glad you looked me up! Tell me all about everything.— Somebody told me you ran away from Frank with a Russian, and that you were living like a Princess! Who is he? I'm dying to know!"

Mary smiled.

"I'll tell you all about it, later on. Now I want to know about you, Paula. What's happened since I saw you last?" she glanced about at the subdued elegance of the room. "You seem to be curled up like a kitten in the lap of luxury."

Paula made an impish grimace.

"Oh, I've everything I want — except a lover."

"Then you haven't? — But how —" Mary started in surprise, but left the sentence unfinished.

"Oh, I've got a sort of a graven image, if that's what you mean! He must love me, I suppose, in his way, or he wouldn't do everything for me; but he's so stern and dignified and cold, br-r-r! I used to be terribly afraid of him at first, but now he just bores me to death, poor old thing! Let me see, who was I with when you saw me last?"

"Dick —"

"Oh, yes, of course. Dickie Stokes.— Well, I went back to America with him, and then I met Dan Ryerson, the wheat plunger, and dropped Dickie. Dan gave me an awfully good time, and promised me heaps of things, but somehow he kept putting off making a settlement on me, and I couldn't get anything definite from him, but I waited. I knew, of course, that it couldn't last long,—he and his wife were just about breaking their necks to get into society, and he'd start in soon to pose as a church member, and pillar of society,—you know the kind, Mazie! — but I never thought he'd be a beast about it. What do you think? He left me,—cold! Without a quarrel, or a word of explanation or warning, he just walked out of the house one night, and didn't come back, ever. He'd given me heaps of money but I'd lived up to every cent — didn't have a thing left!"

"What did you do, Paula? Go back to Dick —"

"Heavens, no! He wouldn't have looked at me after the way I'd treated him. I found out that Dan Ryerson was sailing on the *Alsatia* in two days, with his wife and family and a lot of servants and I—I put all my furniture and stuff in storage, and went on board, too."

"But I thought—" Mary interrupted in surprise, "I thought you said you hadn't any money!"

"Neither had I! I went to the purser before the ship sailed, and told him to speak to Mr. Ryerson, who would pay my passage over. He did, too, like a shot, and whenever I passed him on deck I smiled sweetly and gratefully at him, but he scowled frightfully if his wife's back was turned, and he dared!" She threw back her head and laughed in shrill, childish merriment, with no touch of malice.

"Whatever did you do, when you reached this side, though? Did you meet some one on the steamer?"

"Nobody worth while. Oh, I had a few dollars with me, enough to tip the stewards, and travel properly to Paris, with all my trunks. I took a suite in one of the smartest hotels, engaged a French maid, and launched out. And I couldn't speak six words of French and by that time I hadn't ten dollars in the world!"

"Good heavens! How did you dare!" exclaimed Mary, shadowy visions of French prisons rising before her eyes.

"Well, I hadn't much to lose, had I? It was a gamble, of course, but that's what our lives are, every day in the year,—you know that. What can we be sure of, from one hour to the next? We'd starve if we didn't take chances, wouldn't we? I hadn't been there two days when I noticed a Frenchman in the hotel lobby,—I just couldn't help trying to flirt with him, he looked so dignified and proud of himself. And, Mazie, it worked! He got the manager of the hotel to introduce us and act as interpreter,—they don't think anything of these little affairs over here, you know,—and, well, here I am! His wife is considered

the most beautiful woman in Paris — I saw a portrait of her in the Salon last year, and she really is wonderful. I feel like a little red-headed hop-toad beside her, yet he seems to prefer me — Aren't men funny?" She shook her auburn curls.

"You were fortunate! But Paula, what would you have done if he hadn't come along?" Mary eyed her curiously.

The other girl shrugged her shoulders, with a moue of her rosebud mouth.

"I don't know,— somebody else would have, I guess. What do you hear from America?"

"Nothing. Not a line or a word in years, except the gossip in the Paris *Herald*."

"You haven't heard about Frank, then?"

"Frank Kelly? Not a thing since I left him in London, the day he sailed for New York. Has anything happened? Do tell me, Paula!"

"Oh, I—I thought you knew, of course, or I shouldn't have spoken of him.— You weren't in love with him, were you?"

"I liked him, awfully. But love him—" It was Mary's turn to shrug her shoulders.

"Then it's all right. When you threw him down, he went back to Florrie Hendricks,— she was poor, and sick, and he was sorry for her, I guess, but they say she leads him a dog's life. She can't forget that he was in love with you. Do tell me why you left him, and all about this Russian."

Mary told her as briefly as she could of her last adventure, and Paula's round eyes were wide when she had finished.

"It's wonderful! Think of the luck you've had! And now you're free again, with heaps of pretty clothes

and jewellery, and money enough to live on while you look around you. You're not going back to America, are you?"

"No, I thought of going to London for a while —"

"It's dead now. Every one away for Christmas house-parties, and the season months off. I know heaps of Frenchmen and Austrians,—friends of Albert's,—why don't you stay here, and we can have some good times? You'll like Albert—he's quiet, and sort of—deep, like you."

"Who is Albert? Your —"

The auburn curls shook violently with Paula's nod.

"Yes. He's been awfully good to me. I'd been hitting up the bright lights too much before I came back to France, and soon after I met him I got sick. The doctors said it was the con. and I thought I was a goner, I really did. The funny part of it was, that I didn't care, at all—it didn't seem to matter, very much, and I wasn't a bit sorry for myself. But Albert was kind,—he sent me to the south of France, and did everything for me. It was nearly a year before I was cured, and could come back, but he was waiting for me, just the same. He's trying to educate me, now,—brings me dry old books to read and drags me to the opera, and I wouldn't let him know how it bored me for the world. I ought to qualify for a good actress when he goes back to his wife."

"When? — You think he will, then?"

"Of course. They always do, if the wives wait long enough, and don't act as if they cared too much. You see that's where they have the best of it, in the end. We get the love-making and the attention, and jewellery, and money, and a gay life,—for a little while. But they,—the wives—stand for the one thing that all

men are cowards about;—conventionality. They'll every one of them be traitors to respectability, and sneak away from the moral standard they profess, whenever they get a chance, but sooner or later they all go cringing back. The wives gather them in again, and—what becomes of us? As for me, I'm going to have all the fun I can, while it lasts. Life's short, anyway, so what's the use of bother?"

The philosophical mood, shallow and meretricious as it was, was utterly foreign to Mary's former conception of the other's nature,—could it be that Paula's association with a deeper, more profound mentality could have awakened a spark of intellectual response, that the hours of intimacy which she professed had bored her to extinction, had really borne fruit, of a sort,—had Paula really begun, though gropingly, to think?

Mary's casual call lengthened into a protracted intimate visit, and as a result of their conversation, she left her hotel a few days later, and installed herself in a small but dainty furnished apartment on the rue Perouse, not far from her friend.

She found Monsieur Latelle—Paula's "Albert"—to be a most interesting man, with a magnetic personality and brilliant attainments. She could well understand Paula's physical attraction for him, over the cold, statuesque beauty of his wife, whose photographs she remembered having seen reproduced in more than one society journal, and whose portrait had been the talk of the Salon of the previous year. His infatuation for Paula's selfish charm was evident, but he held himself with a wistful aloofness which aroused a vague pity in Mary's mind. Paula's gay, inconsequent chatter must have been banal in the extreme to him, and he

seemed never to unbend, to relax in the presence of others,— rather he appeared to regard her as a heedless but much-loved child.

The acquaintances who gathered about them were, as Paula had told Mary, French and Austrian for the most part, diplomats, bankers, and men of affairs; the women chiefly coquettes of the most brazen and mercenary type. Paula, with her easy, good-natured adaptability, seemed on intimate terms with them all, but their impression on Mary was negative. Two of the women only,— one English, one American,— awakened in her a more than passing interest. The English woman, Mona Beauchamp, was verging on forty, tall and fair and very slender, with a long white throat and a delicate swaying form like a lily-stem. She bore traces of former exotic beauty, but her listless face was colorless and in her faded blue eyes was the look of one to whom the relief of tears had long been denied. Myra Storm, the American, was tiny, and fragile, with an exquisite pointed little face and great luminous eyes. Her constant companion was a compatriot of hers, a great handsome fellow whose abject devotion to her, so Paula told Mary, had been of so many years standing that it had ceased to be a matter of remark in their circle. Mary felt singularly attracted to these women, widely diversified in type as they were. They held an especial appeal for her, apart from her curiosity, although she longed to know the story which lay behind the Englishwoman's mask of repression, and the reason for the enigmatic look, half yearning, half disgust, which sometimes swept, for a fleeting moment, over Myra Storm's mobile face, when Roy Clifford bent over her chair.

The girl herself moved alone among these new

friends, sufficiently attracted and interested in them to be diverted and amused, but at times the precariousness of her own position, the blank uncertainty of the future, descended upon her like a pall. One or two of the men in Paula's group had made unmistakable advances to her, but for some reason, undefinable to herself, she had shrunk from them.

Christmas-tide came and went, and the first month of the new year was far advanced when one day, while Mary and Myra were lunching in the bijou magnificence of the Café de Paris, Roy Clifford made his inevitable appearance, with a very blond, young giant in tow,—a broad-shouldered, downy-lipped individual, with the pink-and-white freshness still about him, which in later years, when matrimony and a seat in the House have played their part, becomes mere beefiness. The newcomer carried himself with the erectness of bearing which bespoke his military training, and his round blue eyes quickened with sudden interest and admiration as he bowed over Mary's hand.

Captain Cope-Herrington's conversation, as their luncheon progressed, was not by any means what could have been considered brilliant. It consisted principally of "Ha! H'm-m!" accompanied by much nervous stroking of the almost invisible moustache, but his bland eyes never left Mary's face, and her pulses leaped with a curious unaccountable premonition. He was the first man who had looked at her in that undefinable way, for many months, and who had stirred within her the slightest response. His boyish embarrassment and naïvely displayed admiration awakened an amused kindly interest, and she thoroughly approved of his physical breadth and vigorous, clean-cut youth. She was curious to know what might lie behind his self-

conscious repression, and found herself wishing that she could draw him out, if only for a moment.

Later, as she and Myra drove homeward together, the insistent problem of her own immediate future descended again upon her. The tender intonation in Roy Clifford's voice, the little protective gesture as he placed Myra in the victoria, had brought back overwhelmingly the sense of her unshielded, precarious condition, and she shivered, turning to her companion as if mutely appealing for comfort and reassurance.

Myra was gazing out idly at the swiftly passing streets and shop-windows with the half-wistful, half-contemptuous curl of her pretty lips which the girl had grown to recognize.

"Myra," she exclaimed impulsively, leaning forward. "You are a fortunate girl!"

"Fortunate? I?" She turned her head slowly, and Mary read the lurking bitterness in her eyes. "You think so? Sometimes I feel that I am the most wretched woman in the world!"

"But how can you?" Mary's surprise and incredulity were unfeigned. "You have everything in the world that you want — Roy Clifford simply worships you —"

"Ah!" It was as if the bitter cry was wrung from her.

"Yes, he loves me — that's what makes me wretched! That, and knowing that I love him, too, and can't help myself!"

"Why — I — don't understand!"

"No, you couldn't, unless I told you. Sometimes I hate myself because I'm so weak, because I can love him, and do love him, in spite of everything, but it's stronger than I am. It's a horrible story, Mary, but

you've asked me, and somehow it's a comfort to be able to tell some one. I've been with Roy for twelve years, — ever since I was seventeen. And I've worshipped him, loved the very ground he walked on, idolized him into a perfect god, always. We were madly happy for the first few years; — he had great wealth and no ties, and we went everywhere, always together. Then, after a time, business reverses came to him. I loved him so, nothing mattered to me, and I was content, although he was able to give me less and less, and my life became one long struggle with petty economies. After a time, though, I saw that he was changing toward me; — fault-finding, and impatient, and often contemptuous, — but it was months before I saw the truth, before I'd admit it to myself. He was ashamed of me; I was no longer the mistress, blazing with jewels, exquisitely gowned, whom he had been proud to introduce to his friends, and I had no longer an establishment where we could entertain lavishly. Then, too, he was weary of the economies and restrictions with which it was necessary for him to curtail his own extravagance in his life as a man-about-town, in order to supply me with just the means to live. Life became a nightmare, and finally we separated, — I thought forever. Another man came my way, an old man, a millionaire, and I tried to live, and forget. Then, when I was established again, surrounded by greater luxury even than I'd had before, *he* — Roy — came cringing back. I realize that he was content to be my lover while I was the recognized mistress of another man, content to be the favored guest in my home, to leave when my master returned! Oh, Mary, no one can know how horrible it was! — Not the knowledge of what a cad he'd become, but to know that he'd never really been different at heart; that such

love, if you can call it that, was all he'd ever been capable of, only I'd been too blind to see! — You'll hate me, I'm afraid, when I've told you everything, but if you could only understand, you'd pity me! I — I took him back, on his own terms, — I struggled against it, God knows, but I couldn't help it, I loved him so! Some of us are like that, women who live the sort of lives we do, I mean, when we really care. You mayn't be able to understand that, but when love comes to you, you will. I was treacherous to the kind, unsuspecting old man who was doing everything for me. I lost what little self-respect I had left, I was ashamed to look into my own eyes in the mirror for the thing I'd become — but I took him back! So we've gone on, all this time, and so I suppose we shall go on, till the end comes for one of us. His love, such as it is, is lasting. I'm not his mate, I'm an expensive toy, a prize he's willing to share with another! And he's not a man to me, a real man, only a passion, a luxury for which I am willing to pay, pay, pay! Sometimes I wish that he were dead, — then I realize that I couldn't live a day, an hour without him, or the knowledge that he would come back to me. If he was any one else who had come into my life, any one whom I knew from the beginning for what he was, it wouldn't matter so much, though I'd feel pretty low myself, for living the way I do, — but to know that it's really Roy, to have even the memory taken from me of those perfect years when I was so young and so terribly in love and he was the most wonderful man in the world, — it's that which is breaking my heart!"

"Oh, Myra, I never suspected, — I never knew! How hard life is, isn't it? Every one tries so desperately to be happy in their own way, but no one seems to be,

really." Mary stammered confusedly, her thoughts in a turmoil.

"You aren't — disgusted with me?" Myra's flower-like face was white, her eyes strained and appealing. "You can understand, a little, can't you? You don't hate me for telling you?"

"Hate you? Oh, Myra, no! I'm only so sorry, so very sorry! It must be dreadful to care for some one, and find out they're not worth it, only weak and cheap, and bad!"

The other woman winced, and drew back. There was a pause, and then she said, with a hard little laugh:

"Oh, well, I'm not any better than he is, you see — I'm worse, for I'm deceiving the old General, every day of my life! He's sent me abroad for my health for the winter — maybe he's consoling himself in my absence with some big-eyed child in her 'teens, and pitying me, and reproaching himself for his perfidy! It's all in the day's work!"

"Oh, don't misunderstand me! I'm not — I'm only sorry for both of you. He — Roy Clifford — must suffer, too, if he loves you!"

"I wonder!" observed Myra, with a little shrug of her sable-clad shoulders. Then she added: "Here we are at your door. — No, I won't come in, now. I'm going for a long drive in the Bois all by myself, and be as wretched as I like. Then I'll shake off the blues, and be all right. Good-bye, my dear, — see you at dinner."

Mary's thoughts, as the little elevator ascended jerkily to her entresol, were in a chaos of conflicting emotions. Her outlook upon life had undergone a violent change, an upheaval, and it had been too sudden, too radical a transilience, for her to be able on the moment

to grasp the significance of Myra's revelation, or view it dispassionately. She felt deeply sorry for her in her evident suffering, but unable, in her youthful arrogance and the ignorance of her untried heart, to comprehend the existence of a love which could only be bestowed with contempt and self-disgust. The problem of life was becoming more and more inexplicable to her as her eyes were opened,—happy and smiling on the surface, it was honey-combed with disillusionment, undermined to the core with evil, and treachery, and hideous tragedy. Was it only to women like herself, and Myra, and Paula, and poor Rhoda Dering, that such episodes, such experiences came, or did all women—good women—and men, too, pass through the fire of such knowledge, before the meaning of life became clear to them?

The charming boy she had met that day,—Captain Cope-Herrington,—what possibilities for good or evil, weakness or strength, lay behind the rosy guilelessness of his clean-cut, well-bred face?

With Myra, Roy Clifford, and herself, the Captain had arranged a little dinner for the evening, and although she shunned the thought of meeting Roy face to face so soon after this new side-light had been cast upon his character, she found herself looking forward with eager anticipation to the Captain's coming. His pronounced admiration could not have failed to arouse a slight responsive interest, but behind his attitude there had lurked something significant and unnameable, something which was to be felt intuitively rather than seen.

On a tabouret in the entresol a huge square box awaited Mary, and she smiled to herself as she lifted from their soft wrappings a great cluster of Bermuda

lilies, and read the message on the card of Captain Cope-Herrington.

"I wonder!" she mused. Then, laughing softly, she buried her suddenly tingling face in the cool waxen fragrance of his gift.

CHAPTER XII

THE dinner — which had somehow lengthened until it merged into the supper hour — was over, and they were all four on their way from the Café Riche to the rue Perouse, where Paula was giving a party. Mary was not disappointed in her new cavalier, although they had found but one point in common,— their mutual love of horses, and racing as a clean sport. The boy's youth and disingenuousness was apparent, but when the conversation turned at last on athletic sports and games he talked enthusiastically and well, and Roy Clifford evidently considered him an authority.

Mary found his shyness charming, his little bursts of volubility,— when his self-consciousness was lost in his interest in the subject under discussion,— amusing and rarely illuminative. She decided that his chin was rather weak, but his eyes steady, his hands soft and feminine, but his muscles firm and sound from clean living and hard riding. He knew nothing of literature or the arts, and cared less — he appeared merely an intelligent, perfectly-conditioned young animal, and reminded her more of a blooded horse, than anything else. His manner, well-bred and deferential, held even a deeper shade when he addressed her, a respectful admiration which bordered on homage. Men, unless profoundly attracted by her, had treated her with careless courtesy, polite indifference, or easy-going camaraderie in the past, but Captain Cope-Herrington's bearing toward her was different from anything in her

experience. An insidious thought came to her—he seemed to have known Roy, and Myra, and Paula, and the rest of their group for some little time at least, and to be on the closest terms with them all, surely he must know of the irregularities of their lives, and must inevitably have judged her by her associates. Why, then, did he approach her with an almost exaggerated deference and courtesy,—could it be that he was mocking her, “having” her, to use one of his absurd, school-boy expressions? The next moment she had put the idea from her as unworthy,—there was, there could be, nothing vicious or petty behind his clear, steadfast gaze. It seemed to her that, surmising everything, no doubt, he yet treated her as he would a woman of his own class, and kind. It was incomprehensible to the girl,—could he be ignorant of what manner of woman she was, or did he, in his great-hearted simplicity, bear himself to all women with the chivalry of the strong? He piqued her curiosity, and forced her to set aside her preconceived ideas, born of experience. He annoyed, flattered, and charmed her by turns, and was totally and exasperatingly unconscious of the impression he had created, or the interest he had aroused in her.

Paula’s party was a great success, and the shy, young Englishman seemed to be a general favorite, but he clung stubbornly and doggedly in Mary’s train, and refused to be distracted from his sudden allegiance. The French women were much amused at his attitude and many sly and more or less good-natured quips were made at his expense, to which Mary gave laughing response, but if Captain Cope-Herrington heard he made no sign.

He drove her home in the still cold of the hour be-

fore the dawn, and at her door he suddenly found his voice.

"I say, Miss Tinney, I wonder if you'd care to ride to-morrow — *this*,— morning, in the Bois? I think it would be ripping, if you're not too done after last night. What d'you say?"

"How did you know I rode?" Mary asked with a quick smile, as she stood a step above him on the stone stairway.

"Oh, you must, of course. You couldn't know horses, and love 'em as you do, if you weren't a horse-woman. A stiffish gallop in the Bois will do you good, no end, after a night like this. I'm stopping at the Ritz — will you 'phone in the morning, and let me know, when you'd care to start?"

"Yes," replied Mary, demurely. "I will telephone you, Captain. I sha'n't forget. And — thank you for my lilies."

She touched her breast, where, among the laces, she had pinned two or three of the waxen blooms.

"Thank you for wearing 'em, Miss Tinney. I'll hear from you, surely, when you've had a bit of rest? — Right-o! Good night!" He had dismissed their carriage, and she heard his firm, ringing tread echoing back through the silent streets.

Not many hours later, they were pounding along the curved bridle path at full gallop, their horses' hoofs thudding dully in the soft, masking turf. The crisp winter wind whipped the blood into their faces, the exercise brought a sparkle to their eyes and touched lips and cheeks with a sweeping crimson glow, and their pulses leaped with youth, and health, and the joy of living. The ride was glorious, and when they were breathless and spent, they turned their horses and

walked slowly back to the Pre-Catalan, where they devoured crisp, flaky rolls with creamy butter, and drank warm goat's milk, and chattered and laughed as joyously as children, as unrestrainedly as if they had known each other always, as if their lives had run in simple, parallel grooves.

During the days which followed — days of delicious joy, and an abandonment to the happiness of the moment hitherto unknown to the girl, the shadow of one torturing, ever-recurrent thought darkened her mind. What did he think? Did he know? His infatuation was evident. Was he waiting, in all delicacy, for an opportune moment to approach her? Was he merely awkward and unsophisticated, or was his mind really so splendidly unsullied by knowledge of the world about him, that no suspicion entered his thoughts? It was the fault, perhaps, of her own hardly-won experience that the truth did not manifest itself to her.

She found herself longing for, yet dreading, the moment which she instinctively felt to be approaching,— longing for an end to the torturing uncertainty, yet dreading the shattering of this perfect idyll, the beauty of which she knew could never enter her life again. Of the ultimate outcome she was sure;— he could never be to her as other men had been, she meant to hold the memory of these perfect days forever in the treasure-chest of her memory, and she could no more have sullied them with a carnal aftermath than she could have crushed the heart of a child.

Their mutual attraction created little or no comment in Paula's circle, nor the fact that they gradually but surely withdrew from it. Such "affairs" were common occurrences among them, and indeed the fact that Mary had remained so long a free lance had been a mat-

ter of wonder. It was good-humoredly conceded that at first they should wish to be by themselves, and when the dances and gay supper-parties ceased to include them, their places were, in the usual course of events, filled by others, who came and drifted away again in the ever-changing group. The nature of their relationship was, of course, taken for granted, and they were left in peace, to return when the first intoxication had worn off.

The days passed swiftly, all too swiftly for Mary. Each morning which dawned brought with it a new sense of peace and gladness, a new thrill of ecstasy. It seemed to the girl that she had never lived, in all the time which was past. That that which had gone before was but a preparation, a lesson to enable her to understand and appreciate to the full the pure happiness of the present. She gradually ceased to question herself or the future, content to drift on in the golden haze of dreams.

The boy — for so Cecil Cope-Herrington still seemed in her eyes, in spite of his few years of seniority — had never altered in his manner to her since their first meeting, although a diffident tenderness had crept into his voice and intensified as time passed, and the adoration in his eyes was unveiled for all the world to observe.

Mary was too much mistress of herself, too experienced in her involuntary study of human nature to deceive herself for a moment into the belief that she had fallen in love with him. It was the vista of life which he had opened to her, and which she had supposed closed to her forever,— the joy of a pure intercourse with a human being of a world she had hitherto entered only through a clandestine side-door, the relaxation of an

innocent, honest companionship, the novelty of being held in the same category with the women she had viewed at an immeasurable distance, from the other side of the wall of conventionality and prejudice.

Winter waned, and spring came — the warm, sultry spring-time of Paris, and still the boy lingered on. He made no mention of his plans for the immediate future, and Mary did not ask. Her establishment, bijou as it was, had made heavy inroads in her capital, but she shut her eyes to the inevitable. For once, her dominating passion was overruled, the voice of fierce demand which had sounded in her ears in the old days of poverty and wretchedness, and driven her forth to take from the world what it had denied to her, was stilled. This was her holiday, this was her supreme moment, and she meant to drain her cup of happiness, though it proved but shallow.

They had, by mutual consent, taken to dining in odd, out-of-the-way nooks and corners, in preference to the brilliantly thronged cafés of the boulevards, and as the weather grew warmer, they made many excursions on the river to ancient and crumbling inns, where the food and wine were of the best, and where on a second visit they were received as old and honored friends. One evening they dined at the Trois Reines at Passy, and a threatened shower drove them back to town earlier than was their wont. Neither was inclined for the garish gaiety of a cabaret, and instead they ensconced themselves in the little flower-hung balcony of her apartment, overlooking the rue Perouse.

They talked desultorily, and after a time, fell silent.

Mary was physically tired from their long day in the

country, and she lay idly back in her chair, the soft flower-laden air stealing over her senses, and steeping her in a delicious languor.

The boy watched her hungrily,—the long lines of her body beneath the silken draperies were relaxed, and her small head, with its wondrous wealth of red-gold hair, was upturned to the starry sky. He caught his breath sharply, and then rose suddenly to take his leave.

Mary, startled no less by the abruptness of his departure than by the new odd constraint in his voice, looked curiously into his eyes as she held out her hand to him, and found that they were aflame with a light which she had seen before in other eyes, a light of passionate desire. Her very soul sickened, as she retreated a step or two from him, only to find herself an instant later held tightly in his arms, with his kisses raining upon her lips and throat. She struggled blindly, but finding her puny efforts of no avail against his strength she lay passive, until as suddenly as it had overwhelmed him, his passion died within him, and he gently released her.

She sank back against her chair, and clasped it for support, her senses reeling. He stood for a long moment in tense silence, then something very like a sob tore its way from his throat.

"Forgive me!" he said, his voice low, but quivering with pent-up emotion. "Try to forgive me, if you can. I was mad,—I lost control of myself, I—Oh, I am a cad, an utter beast! I—I hadn't the right—!"

She watched him, wordlessly, while he stammered out his apology and stumbled blindly into the drawing-room within.

Long after the thud of her closing door assured her that she was alone, she remained motionless as he had left her, her dream of the past golden weeks shattered at her feet. She did not, could not, even in the first paralyzing moments of her awakening blame him. Surmising what he must of her life, from the environment in which he had found her, even if no whisper of her past had reached his ears, he had every right, from a masculine point of view, to make what advances he chose to her, and the fact that he had not, until that moment, touched her hand or proffered a caress, spoke eloquently of his delicacy and forbearance, in view of his infatuation. Mary had too strong a sense of justice and fairness not to concede this, without question. An overwhelming consciousness of the futility of it all stunned her. What a fool she had been, living and dreaming in a fool's paradise! She had known that the inevitable moment was approaching, but its coming had found her, after all, unprepared. Her beautiful make-believe world had tumbled about her ears, and the stern realities of life crowded in upon her numbed thoughts. The barriers had been let down in that wall which divided her from those other women of guarded, blameless lives, and she had in her thoughts strayed far. Now she would return to the place she had made for herself in the scheme of things, and wander no more in strange paths which led but to an impasse.

The next morning a great cluster of white roses came to her, but no message, no word from him. All day, she roamed ceaselessly about her rooms, trying in vain to summon her numbed faculties to her aid, to take up the threads of her life again where she had let them fall at his advent. But it seemed futile. The changed atmosphere which had surrounded her, the

brief outlook upon existence which she had viewed through his eyes, made her look upon the past with bitter abhorrence, and the thought of a return to it filled her with loathing.

The hours dragged by in dumb misery, and with the approach of night, he came. He was haggard and worn, but his pale face was set in lines of strength and dominant resolution, and the eyes which he slowly lifted to her were clear and steady, with a new unwavering light in their depths. He looked years older, and she realized, with something of a shock, that he was after all not a boy, but a man, with all a man's capacity for emotion, for passion, and the thought made her tremble.

"It is good of you to receive me," he said quietly, as he bent over her head. "I was an utter brute, last night; there is nothing that I can say for myself."

"There is nothing for either of us to say," she answered. "You need not have come to apologize—I quite understood."

"No, Mary!" he cried. "You could not have understood, you did not know!"

"Not—know—" she repeated.

"I had no right to take you in my arms,—no right to touch you! All these months I've known it, I've fought against it till I thought I had conquered it. I tried to leave you, to go home and do what my people,—what every one—expected me to do, but I could not, and day after day I stayed on, telling myself I would go soon, deceiving myself, while every hour my love for you grew stronger, and finally it mastered me. But I should not have spoken to you yet,—it wasn't straight cricket. It wasn't fair to you, or to—some one else."

"To — some one else?" she faltered. It seemed that her dazed brain refused to act, that she could only stand there and stupidly repeat after him the words which fell from his lips.

"To — a girl, at home." The words came slowly and inexorably, and without a perceptible pause he went on. "She is by way of being a sort of cousin of mine, the Honorable Millicent Harborough. She's a really charming girl, and we were kiddies together at Cope Manor. My uncle, Sir Anthony, and the Mater, and every one thinks we will make a match of it,— Millie expects it, too. She's a ripping girl, you know, and all that, and I thought it would be quite all right, after I'd knocked about a bit and seen more of the world — until I met you! Now I know that no other woman can ever be my wife."

"Your wife! Cecil, you're mad,— you don't know what you are saying —!"

"I know that I love you. Nothing else matters, if only you love me a little,— if you're willing to trust yourself to me! Until last night I was blind, but now my eyes are opened, and I know the course I must pursue.— I'm leaving Paris to-night on the midnight express for Calais. I'm going home, straight to the Mater and my uncle, and tell them the truth,— and then I'm going to Millie. I thought that I must see this thing through,— this marriage which has been arranged between us,— but now I know that it wouldn't be fair to any of us three, least of all to her. I should be wronging her far more by marrying her when I love you, than I shall be by going to her frankly and telling her the truth."

"And she — does she care for you, Cecil? You must think of her." Mary's face was colorless, and her

voice low and steady, but her heart was pounding so loudly that it seemed he must hear its muffled beat.

"I don't know," he responded frankly. "I never asked her. I never made love to her,—I mean to say, it was a sort of settled thing, in the family. She's a sensible girl, Millie, you know,—I fancy she just drifted into it, as I did. She won't break her heart over losing me. But ah, Mary, whatever comes, I cannot give you up! You must know,—you must have known all these months, how I loved you! From the first moment I saw you, you must have known there could be no other woman in the world for me. I tried to conquer my love, to do what seemed to me to be the right thing, but it was no use—my love was stronger than I—stronger than anything in this world!"

"You must conquer it! You must go away, and never see me again!" Out of the chaos of her whirling brain came one overpowering thought, one resolve. He had redeemed himself, quixotic though it was, he had been honorable and square. She too would prove that she was made of finer metal, that the corruption of her life had not rendered her wholly insensible to the right. She saw clearly the task before her, in all its hideousness, but she plunged into it, unflinchingly. "I can never be your wife, Cecil, never!"

"You don't—care for me?" he drew himself up, and spoke stiffly, as if he found it difficult to make the words come, and into his eyes crept such a look of unutterable pain, that Mary felt a sharp pang at her heart, but she went on inexorably.

"It isn't that, Cecil. It is hard, God knows, to tell you, but you must know—if you hadn't been blind you would have guessed. I—I am not fit to be your wife.

I am not a good woman. Now you know why marriage between us would be impossible."

"I have guessed,—I have known," he answered, a depth of tenderness she had never heard before creeping into his voice. "Did you think that made any difference,—that anything could, except what you are,—what our life together will be? And don't you know, Mary, my dearest, that I can only hold you in higher honor and respect for having told me this, of your own accord. I know how hard life must have been to you, poor child,—you shall tell me all that you wish me to know, some time, and I will listen, but I shall never question, or seek to know more than you want to tell me. Nothing makes any difference but our love for each other, dear,—or ever can." Slowly, with infinite gentleness he took her in his arms, and this time she yielded, and lay unresisting against his heart. She was filled with wondrous content,—the dream which she had believed dispelled forever, had returned in a more enchanting guise than before, and opened up a vista which had never presented itself to her thoughts.

At last, he put her gently from him.

"I must go, dearest. It is late, and I must return to the hotel before train-time. It is hard to leave you, Mary, but you shall hear from me almost at once. I shall count the hours until I can come to you again."

"But your people!" cried Mary, in the throes of a sudden dismayed thought. "They will be very angry, and what will they say, when they know about me,—about my life—"

"They will know no more than what I choose to tell them. You need not be afraid on their account, I can always manage the Mater, and *she* always manages

Uncle Tony,—so there you are. I must go, Mary, my darling! Kiss me, and wish me a safe voyage.”

“Oh, I do,—I do, Boy, dear!” she cried. “A safe voyage, and — a happy ending!”

CHAPTER XIII

THE next few days were magic ones. Mary wandered about in a haze of unreality, the familiar objects in her apartment, seemed new and strange to her eyes, the well known lights and shadows of the rue Perouse viewed from her balcony became vague and meaningless to her, as of a street untrodded within her memory. She was a stranger to her very self, the moods which assailed her had hitherto been unknown to her.

At one moment she would be raised upon the highest pinnacle of hope and radiant joy, her thoughts rioting over the years to come, picturing to herself the splendid fulfilment of her vague dreams, the happiness and content of the future with Cecil at her side, and perhaps a little child in her arms. It is undeniable that the thought of his wealth, and the social position which would be hers as his wife, and the mistress of his establishments, played no small part in the pictures she evoked in her enraptured mind, but the dominating thought was that she would be a woman respected, and self-respecting, with the past blotted mercifully from her memory, and only years of serenity stretching before her.

Then the chimers of happiness would fade, and scenes of horror would take its place before her mental eyes; — visions of being found out in the height of her social triumphs, and of being dragged down from her high place, and ostracized and shunned, and hounded

into obscurity and eternal disgrace, like a woman of old, stoned through the streets. Torturing phantasies followed close upon the heels of the first, of meeting face to face some wretched reminder of the past, some man, perhaps, of the many whom she had known during the two years of her nomadic existence with Baron Iverskoi,—nightmare visions of eluding her nemesis, and of being pursued, threatened, blackmailed, cornered, and finally betrayed, and carrying down with her into the ruin of her hopes the man who loved her.

One thought, one question pounded unceasingly into her brain,—could a woman ever tear from the book of her life a chapter which was closed? Could she ever successfully live down the memory of her misspent years, as a man could? Was disgrace and ruin inevitable, for the man as well as the woman, in such a marriage as she contemplated? Surely, surely life could not be so hard! Men were forgiven their faults, their mistakes, and this was a man's world,—but might not a woman, with tact, and discretion, and charm, succeed in evading the pitfalls which men had helped to dig for her youthful venturesome feet? She recalled dozens of so-called mesalliances,—the newspapers were full every day of different variations of the old tale of the beggar-maid and the king—of nobility wedded to Gaiety girls; men of position marrying women of mystery. Surely, some of these women were no better, or less known than she, and it could not be that all these marriages ended in disaster!

She had heard from Cecil,—a long letter written from the train, and a hurried note telling of his arrival at Cope Manor. Then—nothing, and the hours lengthened into interminable days, in which she longed with every passing moment for Cecil's return, to re-

assure her and banish the hideous spectres of doubt and fear from her mind.

At last, driven into a nervous tension by the torture of her thoughts which demanded some outlet beyond the four walls of her home, she ventured out a-foot. The faithful Nina protested, for a penetrating drizzle of rain was falling, the skies were leaden, a sharp wind blew cuttingly around the corners of the narrow streets and down the boulevards, chilling and withering the May blossoms upon her balcony, and beating maliciously in her face. But Mary enjoyed the sudden gusts which made her gasp for breath, the stabbing tingle of the rain upon her unveiled face. The warm, perfumed air of the house had stifled her, she had longed to get out in the open, to battle with the elements, and the grey, murky day suited her mood.

She trudged on with no heed to the direction she had taken, or the distance she had placed between herself and her home, when an astonished feminine voice, calling her name, roused her from her reverie, into consciousness of her surroundings. She was on a foot-path which wound beside the driveway far out in the Bois, and Mona Beauchamps' pale face stared out at her from the window of her brougham.

"My dear, what are you doing abroad on a day like this? Come, do get in, and let me drive you home."

Mary realized suddenly that she felt very tired, and darkness was fast descending about her. She accepted the English woman's offer gratefully, and they rolled swiftly down the broad, chestnut-lined avenue.

"You are really drenched!" Mrs. Beauchamp was all motherly concern. "What can have possessed you to go for a tramp on such a day as this? You've quite ruined your pretty frock! — and where have you been

hiding yourself these many days? And what have you done with that charming young countryman of mine? We are all simply dying of curiosity about you, you know,—I think if you hadn't turned up to-day, we should soon have descended upon you in a body, and made you explain!"

Mary smiled faintly.

"I haven't been hiding away,—I just haven't been going about much, lately, that is all," she protested. "I didn't realize how long it was since I had seen any of you. Have you really missed me?"

"Oh, heaps! We couldn't imagine what had become of you! But first of all, I want to know where Sir Galahad is,—that nice, blond boy you annexed so selfishly," explained Mrs. Beauchamp, archly.

"Captain Cope-Herrington? He has gone home." Something in her tone made the other woman turn and look searchingly into her averted face. She evidently drew her own conclusions from what she saw there, for after a little pause she rested her slender gloved hand on the girl's, and said with an attempt at lightness which deceived neither of them:

"Ah, well, my dear, they always do! But there is one consolation,—another comes so soon, treading almost on the heels of his predecessor,—when one is young and charming.— Ah," she added, with sudden vivacity. "There is a wealth of gossip and some wee bits of scandal, too, waiting for you. So much has occurred since you dropped out of sight. You remember Lucette Duresmes, do you not? — The little brunette, with the dark, piquant, laughing face?"

Without waiting for a reply, she plunged into a recital of the late adventures of their mutual friends, which lasted until Mary's door was reached, the other

woman watching her through narrowed eyes to see that the girl recovered her self-possession from the shock of the other's tactlessly direct question.

Mary interrupted the flow of sharp-edged anecdotes as they turned into the rue Proust, and turning to her companion, asked impulsively,

"Won't you dismiss your brougham and come in and have a quiet little dinner with me,— if you have no engagement, of course? It is such ages since I have seen you, and I should so like to have a nice long chat with you."

Curiosity, and a genuine kindness toward Mary, and the desire to cheer her in her evident loneliness, actuated Mrs. Beauchamp to accept her invitation. She felt sure from the girl's repressed manner that something of vital import lay heavily upon her mind, and that she wished to unburden herself of it by talking it over confidentially with some one who could understand, and possibly sympathize. She took for granted that Mary's romance had been the usual trite story of an infatuation soon past, common to the world in which she moved, but she was vaguely sorry it had come to the girl, for Mary seemed of different clay from Lucette and the rest; more intense, with greater depth to her nature, perhaps, than she herself realized. She would suffer far more poignantly than the others, if her heart was involved.

Once in her dainty boudoir, however, Mary seemed loath to bring forward the subject evidently on her mind, or at a loss how to begin. Mrs. Beauchamp in conversation flung out one or two tentative questions, but Mary did not respond to them, and the other woman decided to wait until the girl's own need drove her to speak.

One thing puzzled Mrs. Beauchamp; — Mary's listening, expectant attitude. It was almost as if she waited for some one, or something. At a chance knock upon her door, she turned toward it with an eagerness which she made no attempt to conceal, and her disappointment when only Nina appeared upon a trivial errand, was manifest. It was but a repetition of the age-old story, Mrs. Beauchamp told herself, the episode of the youth who loved and rode away. She had seen endless variations of it, had perhaps lived, herself, through a phase of it, but her heart went out in mute sympathy to the overwrought girl before her.

Dinner was over and Mrs. Beauchamp had lighted her after-coffee cigarette, before Mary voluntarily gave her a slight indication that her easy assumption of the nature of the affair between the young English officer and her hostess had not been the true one. The talk of the early evening had been desultory. Mary had been noncommittal, and had sought so obviously to distract the trend of the conversation, when it threatened to lead her into the ambush of herself and her personal affairs that her guest had wisely kept to the open, and discoursed on generalities and the affairs of their mutual friends with a delicate satire which under other circumstances would have been diverting and illuminative, but both had been subtly influenced by the tension in the air, and after a time, as the attempt to combat it became too much of an effort, silence had fallen between them.

Mary was lying back in her long chair, her hands clasped behind her head, gazing dreamily into the glowing coals in the grate, which the dampness and chill in the air had made welcome, when she suddenly remarked, with studied carelessness:

"I wonder if one can ever begin over again."

Mrs. Beauchamp's cigarette stub dropped into her coffee-cup, where it hissed angrily for an instant and then died with a tiny gasp of acrid smoke.

"An affair, you mean, my dear? Never. When once it has run its course, it is worse than folly to try to rejuvenate it, and an attempt to prolong it only draws out the agony. Sentiment is a will-o'-the-wisp. It can be felt, but not with the hands. If you try to hold it, it slips through your fingers, like quicksilver, and scatters in a thousand tiny globules, which you can never reassemble. I'm not trying to be clever, I'm speaking from experience. I once broke a thermometer when I was a child, and experimented with the fragments. Life — some phases of it, — has impressed me very forcibly, since, as being like the result I obtained."

"Oh, I didn't mean — affairs, exactly. Not in that way. But — if one wanted to change one's life, perhaps, to live in an entirely different way, among a different class of society, — is it possible to do it successfully? If one wanted to forget everything connected with a past environment, and start in all over again, — how would it work out?"

"That would depend on the past environment being fundamentally the same morally as the one chosen to enter. If one wanted to leave a bohemian, unconventional atmosphere for a purely social one, it would be easy if neither one's self nor the associates one had become identified with had flagrantly transgressed the unalterable social law, and providing, too, that one belonged by birth to the upper strata, or had achieved something which would make one a social acquisition, — but to attempt, if this is what you are driving at, to go

from our world, which is popularly and politely called the half-world, into the other,—that is sheer madness!”

“I don’t see why—it doesn’t seem fair. Men do it, every day.”

“No, they do not, my dear child. That is where you make the common mistake. Men are not dwellers in our world, they are merely visitors,—week-end guests, so to speak. Their peripatetic sojourns among us apparently leave no trace upon them, and they are received upon their inevitable return to their own, as explorers from a strange continent,—unless they attempt to take one of us with them. Then the man is banished utterly into the outer darkness, or the woman is cast forth alone, and after a proper penance in the sackcloth and ashes of social disapproval, he is welcomed as a reclaimed sinner.”

“But there are so many instances of just that sort of thing—of men marrying women not of their class, women about whose reputation there have been whispers, and more than whispers,—surely not all of them have been unsuccessful? Surely some of them must have been happy!”

“Perhaps, for a little, little while. Just as long as the first glamour lasts and the man’s eyes are blind to the things which seem of so little account beside his happiness, but which are significant, nevertheless. Little snubs, little slights, sudden nearsightedness on the part of his former friends,—these things amuse him at first, if he is philosophical. Later they return to rankle and prey upon his mind, and disillusionment comes, and a bitter hatred of himself and the woman who in his eyes is responsible for the havoc of his life;—for since the day when the first man accused the

woman, in answer to the voice of the Lord God, so he still condemns her, in answer to his self-reproaches. Or, if in rare cases they weather the social storm together,—these two people of different worlds,—and the man stands fast, disaster of another sort comes to them. The man always says at first: ‘The past is dead and forgotten. Nothing that you have ever done, nothing that you have been, matters. We will start afresh.’ But it does matter, it always matters, it must be taken into daily account! When the first ecstasy is past, and life has become normal again, little doubts creep in, ugly little suspicions borne of an overheard conversation, a look, a tone, an ordinary act of courtesy toward a guest,—creep into the man’s mind, not to be dislodged, but to expand into hideous proportions, to slay his love and poison his life. In the case of an innocent woman of his own sort, a woman whose whole life had been an open book to him, such a doubt would perhaps never enter his mind. But with this woman it is different—he knows what she has done, what she has been, what she is capable of being again. And loathing comes to him. No, Mary, no matter what the conditions may be, or the temperaments of the two people involved, nothing can ever come of such an experiment but rank tragedy, and it is worse than folly to make the attempt!”

She paused, and Mary gave an involuntary shudder at the grim finality in her low, earnest tones. A dark curtain of prophetic truth had fallen between her and the intoxicating visions of the future she had pictured, and life stretched before her, inexorable, and unspeakably dreary and grey.

Mrs. Beauchamp stirred in her chair, and stretched forth a slim white hand to her cigarette case. When

the first feathery wreath of fragrant smoke had curled from her lips, she spoke again, this time in an altered, musing tone, as though she were merely thinking aloud.

"Shall I tell you of the experience of a woman I knew? It will, perhaps, help you to understand. It is a variation of what I've been trying to put before you, in that the man never changed, but the result was the same,—tragedy! It is merely another case of the 'Second Mrs. Tanqueray,' under different circumstances.

"The woman was a clergyman's daughter in rural England. She was splendidly educated, but had seldom been beyond the vicarage gates. They were wretchedly poor, and men have considered her beautiful. Her father occasionally took in young men, to coach them in their studies and so help out his miserable salary. Well, the usual thing happened. The girl eloped with one of them, and—he didn't marry her. She couldn't go home, of course, and she drifted through various episodes for a few years, until she met a man who loved her with a great, pure love. He was in the Guards, young, handsome, rich, of ancient blood and a proud name, but he made her his wife in the face of all the world. She loved him devotedly in return, but—what was the result? He was kicked out of the Guards, blackballed at his clubs, ignored by his family, shunned by society, broken in spirit, ruined, done for! But he stood by the woman and together they fled to the continent, and began the wretched existence which lasted through dreary, miserable years until death released him,—years spent in frequenting the public clubs and gambling casinos of Ostende, and Trouville, and Monte Carlo, and Hamburg, and Buda-Pesth, con-sorting with crooks and chevaliers d'industrie of every

nationality, and the birds of prey who were their companions. Dieu, what a life! Occasionally, they met nice people, the right sort, in a casual way, only to be dropped without explanation when their story was known. The man was uncomplaining and always kind, but the woman, loving him better than her own soul, had to sit idly by and watch the ruin of his life, which his love for her had wrought. That is all the story, but ah! my dear, it is a true one! It couldn't have ended any other way. Rail at life as we will, we cannot change it."

Again silence fell between them, and this time both women were loath to break it. Mrs. Beauchamp sat buried in her own thoughts, the cigarette, tipped with a crest of ashes, hanging unheeded between her fingers. Mary looked at her in mute pity and sympathy. She could not doubt that it was the other's own story which she had just heard, and now she knew the secret of the sadness in the drained eyes, the repressed bitterness with life and all that it could bring, which she had instinctively read at their first meeting.

When their conversation was resumed, it was in a lighter vein, and the topic under previous discussion was tacitly avoided. The constraint remained, however, and when Mrs. Beauchamp, with an exclamation of dismayed surprise at the lateness of the hour, rose to depart, Mary did not press her to remain longer. She longed to give some expression of comfort and sympathy but the older woman's manner, perfectly composed and somewhat aloof, warned her that such an attempt would be proudly repelled. The story must remain between them as it had been told to her, that of an episode in the life of a stranger.

After Mrs. Beauchamp had taken her departure,

Mary lay until far into the night, with wide, sleepless eyes staring into the darkness. The pretty air-castles she had builded had fallen about her, never to rise again. She recognized the underlying truth in the other woman's story, in her exposition of life as she had found it, and she knew her roseate visions of a possible future, for the mere chimera they had been. She realized the futility of the hope that a marriage between herself and Cecil Cope-Herrington could result in anything but catastrophe, and she shrank in spirit from the task before her, of disillusionizing him.

Late on the afternoon of the following day, she wrote a letter.

That evening, *Nina* brought two cards in to her. She pondered over the strange names for an instant, and then a light broke over her. On the cards were inscribed "Sir Anthony Grimthorpe," and "Mr. Wilmerding Pennell." Sir Anthony! Cecil's uncle!

She entered the drawing-room, and found herself confronted by a tall, well-built elderly man, whose finely poised head was crowned with a wealth of iron-grey hair, and whose firm, shaven lips were set in an uncompromising, straight line. His companion was small and spare of figure, with drooping shoulders, a bald shining head, and little, peering eyes set close together. Instinctively, Mary addressed the first, and elder man of the two.

"Sir Anthony Grimthorpe?"

He inclined his head.

"I am Miss Tinney. You desired to see me?"

"Yes, Madame. I regret that it was necessary for me to intrude upon you, but I have come upon a matter which is of vital moment to us both. May I present my solicitor, Mr. Pennell?"

Mary bowed coolly, and motioning to chairs, she seated herself. She was surprised to find that she was quite composed, and mistress of the occasion, quite as if this visit had been an expected one, and she had been fortified to meet whatever contingency might arise from it.

There was a little pause, while Sir Anthony regarded her critically but not unkindly, as if at a loss, now that he had come, as to how to state the nature of his errand. Mary waited in quiet self-possession for him to break the silence.

"Mademoiselle," he began at last. "You will perhaps comprehend the reason for my intrusion, when I tell you that Captain Cope-Herrington is my nephew."

"Yes, I have often heard Cecil speak of you."

He waited an instant, as if hoping that she would continue to speak, but she offered him no assistance, so he resumed.

"He has returned to his home, and informs us that he has proposed marriage to you,—and you have accepted him."

"That is quite true."

"Miss Tinney, I stand *in loco parentis* in regard to Captain Cope-Herrington, and it is because of this fact, that I am here. My task presents unexpected difficulties,—I had thought, if you will pardon me, to find you older, more worldly in appearance, more—"

"More the recognized type of the adventuress, you mean, don't you, Sir Anthony? Why select your words with such care? I quite understand." She spoke quietly without bitterness, in a cool, level tone she scarcely recognized as her own.

Sir Anthony bowed.

"I thank you. You make my task less difficult. Miss Tinney, I gathered during my interview with my nephew, that he informed you that a marriage has already been arranged between himself and a young woman of his own set,— I may say, of his own family."

Mary inclined her head.

"This marriage is an eminently suitable one in every way. The young woman is of irreproachable position, and — antecedents. Mademoiselle Tinney, this marriage must take place! My nephew's career — his happiness, depends upon it."

Mary raised her eyebrows.

"Cecil is very sure his happiness lies with me," she replied, gently.

"My nephew is young and impressionable. He has known few women, and comparatively little of life. His views are — quixotic. But even if this marriage with his kinswoman was not essential to his future, a marriage with you, I regret to say, would be quite impossible, in any case."

"Impossible?"

"Of your antecedents we have been able to ascertain nothing, but we have learned facts, of which we have proof, of your life during the past few years, which render your marriage with my nephew absolutely out of the question. I am sorry to be compelled to be so explicit, but the circumstances demand plain speaking. I trust I shall not be obliged to go into detail —"

"That will be quite unnecessary, Sir Anthony. I have not deceived Cecil in any way. He is fully cognisant of certain episodes in my past life, and has made his decision, in spite of them. He is of age —"

"But this is not a matter for him to decide, Miss

Tinney. My nephew is impulsive and headstrong,—he does not realize how irreparably this proposed step would affect his whole future life. You know the world far better than he,—you must know how fatal such a marriage would be, for him! You believe that his happiness lies in your hands,—then loosen them, and set him free!”

“Sir Anthony, do you realize what you are asking of me? You speak of his future—but what of mine? Suppose I care for Cecil—really care? Is it likely that I will voluntarily relinquish the happiness within my grasp because of your sophistries?”

“Yes, if you love him, you will give him up. No woman who loves a man would willingly drag him down to destruction. The unfortunate part of this whole most unfortunate affair is that, if you care for my nephew, you must inevitably suffer. I sympathize with you most heartily, as does my sister, Mrs. Cope-Herrington, but the situation is unalterable. However, it is our earnest wish to make everything as easy for you as possible,—to offer you some slight recompense for your magnanimity —” he paused, involuntarily.

Mary had risen to her feet, in sudden outraged fury. Her face was colorless, but her long, tawny eyes flashed fire.

“So that is what you have come for, Sir Anthony!” her voice quivered under the iron control she had placed upon it. “That is your errand—to bribe me! To buy me off!”

“My dear young woman —” interposed the barrister, speaking for the first time, but she silenced him fiercely.

“You think me purely mercenary,—that I entrapped your nephew into a proposal of marriage as a

mere speculation, to force you to pay for his release! That is it, isn't it? Well, let me tell you, Sir Anthony, that if I thought your nephew's real happiness and mine lay in this marriage, nothing on earth could separate me from him!"

"Then you do not think so? You understand that such a marriage would be impossible."

"I wrote to him this afternoon, releasing him."

"My dear young lady —"

But Mary silenced him with a weary gesture. Her rage had died within her as swiftly as it had risen. She felt suddenly tired and worn out with the conflict of her emotions, longing for an end to the interview, that she might be alone.

"When Cecil asked me to marry him, I thought at first that it would be possible, but when I reflected, I realized that such a marriage would only end in misery for us both. There is nothing further to be said, gentlemen. The episode is closed, so far as Captain Cope-Herrington is concerned."

"But not as far as we are concerned! My dear Miss Tinney, you are a woman of rare discernment and great unselfishness! My nephew will thank you, in six months, for saving him from himself! But I have here notes to the value of five thousand pounds,—I beg that you will allow me to leave them with you, not as a bribe, an insult, but as a sincere mark of our appreciation of your sacrifice."

"I did not, and do not, love your nephew, Sir Anthony,—I wanted to be an honest woman, and I sincerely thought I could make him happy. I can't deny that his wealth and position influenced my decision, but — I can't accept money, now."

"Nevertheless, I must beg that you do not decide

hastily, that you give yourself time for due reflection. Understand that we offer this in payment for nothing, but in sincerest friendship, as an expression of goodwill.— You have the papers with you, Pennell? ”

“ Yes, Sir Anthony. Here.”

“ I beg that you will allow me to leave the notes, together with these papers, here with you. We are at the Hotel Athenee. If you decide to accept the notes, — and I trust that you will, like a sensible young lady — please sign the papers, as a mere matter of form, and return them to me in the morning.— We will not intrude upon your further, but please allow me to express my admiration for your wisdom in the step you have taken, Miss Tinney. I am sure that you will never regret it. And I wish to tender my thanks to you for saving my nephew from the consequences of his own folly.”

He held out his hand to her, and after an instant's hesitation, she placed hers within it.

After her two visitors had taken their departure, Mary stood for a long time as if turned to stone. Her resentment at the nature of Sir Anthony's mission faded when the justice of it was borne in upon her consciousness. After all, what was she more than he had supposed her,— a mere adventuress, a creature bartering herself for gain, for a livelihood, for luxuries she could obtain no other way? It was natural that he should have considered her motives purely mercenary, and acted accordingly. But the thought of accepting the notes, of touching a penny of the money which came through the one pure honorable attachment she had ever known, was revolting to her.

Long she pondered, and at last a revulsion of feeling came to her. After all, she must take up her life

again, she must go on as she had started,— this last episode showed her the futility of a hope for anything better. Her life had become hideous, repugnant to her, but she had deliberately made it what it was. She told herself fiercely that she was not sorry, she had no regrets. Had she not deliberately chosen the path upon which her feet were set, she would still be a clod at the mill, broken by now in health and spirit, old before her time,— and surely her present condition was far better than the first!

Had she not taken the only way open to her, her path could never, by the remotest possibility have crossed Cecil's. The very acts which placed her irrevocably beyond the pale, had developed her into the woman who had chained his fancy. He was only a boy, young and impressionable, as his uncle had said. In a few months he would be glad of his escape,— she would swiftly become merely a phase of his Parisian memories. But she must live,— she must crush her foolish sentimental qualms and accept this money, this gift the gods offered. The small capital she had hoarded so carefully, the settlement the Baron had made upon her,— where should she turn when it had vanished? How Paula, and Myra, and the rest would laugh at her scruples! This money would enable her to live as she pleased for a long while to come — to study, and work, and make of herself the woman she wished to be. With it in her possession, she could turn her back, for a time at least, on the life of the past, and thoroughly equip herself for the future. Should sentimentality, the mere memory of a brief episode, deprive her of the opportunity within her grasp?

Feverishly, without giving herself time for further thought, she seized the papers and affixed her signature.

CHAPTER XIV

IN an old and celebrated corner of the Latin Quarter, on a narrow, cobbled street, is a tiny, brick-paved court-yard, entered by an old stone gateway and flanked on three sides by ancient grey walls. It is swept and scrubbed and kept spotlessly clean by the old concierge, who dwells behind the first door to your right as you pass under the archway. Other little doors, some decorated by huge fantastic knockers of bronze and old brass, dot the three walls, with here and there a window, draped from within with soft white curtains, and bright with geraniums in bloom. An occasional cat, gaunt but gaily ribboned, sits with arched back and twitching tail regarding the casual intruder with true feminine curiosity, or lolls in sleepy indolence and content upon the broad sill.

This tranquil backwater in the rushing turbulent torrent of Parisian life is known as the Impasse du Maine, and here Mary found an abode to her liking — a huge, bare, high-ceilinged studio with two tiny chambers adjoining. Here she established herself, far from the hectic existence of the grandes boulevards, from her former friends and the mode of life with which she was satiated and wearied beyond endurance, and here she commenced in real earnest to gratify her long-smouldering desire for a broader, more comprehensive knowledge than her past career had vouchsafed to her.

With the announcement that she was leaving France for a time, and a vague intimation that the polo sea-

son would perhaps find her at Ostende, she had bidden adieu to Paula and her associates, and closed the little apartment on the rue Perouse, turning the key also on the poignant, bitter-sweet memories of which it had been the stage-setting. She dismissed her servants, all but the faithful Nina, who, volubly protesting against this latest whim, had nevertheless insisted upon accompanying her mistress into her self-imposed exile.

Pierre de Valcourt, a young Frenchman who had been a frequent visitor to the little house on the Avenue Wagram two years before, had first awakened her curiosity and interest in the Quartier, and now in her desire for a quiet corner, where she might study and work, undisturbed by friends, or any reminders of her old existence, the thought of this little colony across the Seine, unknown and unexplored by the denizens of that other world returned to her, and her quest for a domicile had ended in the Impasse du Maine.

An ancient tapestry or two, a silk rug of mellow, time-blended hues, and some odd bits of wonderfully carved old furniture, picked up in out-of-the-way shops and corners, transformed the bare studio into a living room of comfort and beauty. Mary lined the walls with books,—a heterogeneous collection, some of which, it must be confessed, she had chosen merely for the quaintness or oddity of their bindings, but most of them were volumes, the authors of which she had heard mention of, and whom she had wished to make her friends. Flaubert and Gautier hobnobbed with Voltaire and Rousseau, and Montesquieu and Le Sage elbowed each other on the slender shelves, while Rabelais looked down upon them paternally from the mantel. A daintily laden tea-wagon, and a Louis Quatorze sewing-table lent gracious feminine touches to the austerity

of the room, and a great silky buff-colored matou, who appeared from nowhere and adopted Mary with condescending approval, sprawled his graceful length before the empty hearth, and added the last note of homeliness to the scene.

Mary found her neighbors in the Impasse du Maine to be friendly disposed, and incurious as to her antecedents or purpose in coming to dwell among them, and she was soon on excellent terms with them all.

On her left, a youthful and optimistic artist, Philip Giron, daubed away at impossible ballet girls, in sublime enthusiasm, and when his funds were low, drew, with infinite disgust, the really clever cartoons, political and otherwise, which provided him with the necessities of life. On the right, Aurel Mezlenyi, a Hungarian of indeterminate age, spare and stooping of figure, with huge, luminous dark eyes and long tapering sensitive fingers, worked interminably at the opera which was to make his name immortal, often playing a single, monotonous phrase over and over indefatigably, on his thin-toned piano, until Mary thought she should scream aloud at the maddening insistence of it, and then suddenly, as if to make amends, dashing into a rioting czardas, or gliding tenderly into a strain so hauntingly sweet, that it left the girl quivering and starry-eyed.

A middle-aged Englishwoman who illustrated magazine articles, and wore a Derby on her close-cropped, iron-grey curls; an elderly sculptor, and three merry art students completed the group of her neighbors, and all were soon her fast friends.

When she explained, vaguely but with evident sincerity, that her object in taking up her abode in the Quartier was to make a study of French literature and

the arts, they threw out many helpful suggestions. The Englishwoman told her of certain classes to attend, and Monsieur Badin, the sculptor, at her tentative request, found a tutor for her, an ancient professor from a university in the south of France, who had come to the Quartier, on resigning his chair, to make his home with a lifelong friend, a marine painter of note.

Under his guidance, Mary augmented her small library valuably, and in his illuminating company she revisited the Louvre and other galleries and museums, finding that his deep and sympathetic knowledge opened new and undreamt-of treasures before her wondering eyes. Now and again, Mezlenyi would descend upon her, in his impetuous, dominant way, and bear her off for an evening of weird glorious music, at the studio of one or another of his friends. She frequently accompanied the three students, also, to a merry dinner at the Café des Deux Magots, or the little Brasserie de Lourdes, on the rue Jacob, and in return gave many a delightful little supper in her studio which every one attended, even the old professor, who sat with the yellow cat invariably perched upon his shoulder, and volubly discussed Nietzsche with Hilda Bickerstaff, the Englishwoman,— and the saucy Nina waited upon them all, and rolled her big sloe eyes at the susceptible youngest student. There were pleasant trips, too, out into the country,— to Suresnes or St. Cloud, or farther afield to Poissy, where they spent whole, delightful, languorous days, while the more serious-minded sketched, and the rest read and lounged about, or prepared luncheon in true picnic fashion.

It was still another phase of life to Mary, and she enjoyed it to the full. The easy camaraderie, which asked few questions but made no advances beyond the

boundary she had set about herself, was novel and refreshing to her jaded senses and she responded quickly to the friendly atmosphere, and her nature opened like a flower. These people were workers, not drones, they knew life thoroughly, but they were not embittered nor dismayed. Poverty but softened them, failure brought sympathy and a tactfully helping hand — trouble only drew them closer together in a surer bond of friendship. When Mezlenyi fell ill with a fever, it was Hilda Bickerstaff, in a hideous dressing-gown and flapping slippers, who relinquished two orders and nursed him back to health; and it was long before any one discovered that the patron who had purchased two of Philip Giron's impossible ballet girls, and thus enabled him to send his ailing sister to Normandy for the hot months, was Monsieur Badin, the old sculptor.

Mary was astonished to discover how very cheaply she was living,—the simplicity of her present mode of existence made but small demands upon her capital, and she missed none of the luxuries and extravagances which in the past had been mere accessories of her daily life.

The summer passed swiftly, in a haze of perfect peace and contentment. If she sighed for the vision of social habilitation and triumph, which for a brief moment had been hers, it was as if over a passing dream. In her new environment, the affair of the previous winter seemed unreal and distorted in her memory,—only sometimes the thought of Cecil came with tender insistence, and brought a smile and a sigh. Dear boy, he had been so charming,—and so good! Had the fates ordained that she had become his wife, she would never, by look or word, have given him cause to suspect for an instant that she had not loved him. But

all that was past and gone now. She had received one missive from him in reply to her letter releasing him from their proposed marriage,— a wildly passionate and incoherent appeal,— and then, silence. She honestly hoped, for his own sake, that his infatuation for her would prove, as Sir Anthony had intimated, to be but a passing flame, soon smothered by the conventional routine of his life at Cope Manor. Yet she would not have been human, had she not desired also that a little memory of her might linger, and be an invisible bond between them, though the paths of their future lay far apart.

The first frost of the winter had reached the Quarter, and nipped the geraniums on the windowsills in the Impasse du Maine, when one day, in an English society chronicle which Miss Bickerstaff had left with her, Mary came upon the portrait of a sweet-faced girl, in the tri-plumed coiffure of her presentation, and read beneath it of the approaching nuptials, at St. George's, Hanover Square, of the Honorable Millicent Gwendoline Harborough, daughter of Lady Harborough, of Harborough Hall, Hants, to Captain Cecil Cope-Herrington of the Fourth Lancers. Sir Anthony had been right, then, in his surmise,— the wound she had inflicted had been but a surface one, after all! That which Cecil had mistaken for a grand passion had proved but an incident,— perhaps he already "thanked" her for saving him from himself! Yet how charmingly he had wooed her, how sincere he had been, how passionately adoring! She— this girl with the serene brow and dominating chin, this "ripping girl Millicent,"— she would preside in the house of his father's, and bear him children, and guard the musty honor of his name! And she would rule him, too, or her looks belied her,— rule

him, and hedge him in with responsibilities until he grew stodgy, and beefy, and pompous, and the hot-headed boy who had laid his heart at her feet, would be as dead as the lilies he had showered upon her.

Ah, well! those months would remain to her as a single white page in the soiled book of her memories, — he had given her what no other man had offered, and the solace of it would sweeten her life, forever. If she was a little chagrined at his prompt defection, the sting of her own conscience at the part she had played, was assuaged.

When the école reopened, and every one about her was hard at work once more, Mary found time, amid her own studies, to pause and envy them. Each had their talent, their vocation, their niche in the architecture of the world, however small and inconspicuous. But she — what was she? She had no talent, no asset, even, save the strange beauty and elusive charm, which had enabled her to escape from her sordid wretchedness, and the strong will which had saved her from the pitfalls of passion and acquired vices, to which a weaker nature might have succumbed.

The vicissitudes of her life had taught her adaptability, and her ruling passion to grasp every experience which came her way, every new and untried phase of life, and make it her own, led to a desire to try her hand at the work her friends were engaged in.

She borrowed a lump of clay from Monsieur Badin, and tried patiently to mould a bust of Gargantua, the buff-colored cat, but after several attempts she gave it up in despair. Her second effort was better — Philip Giron lent her an old canvas and some brushes and tubes, and she set boldly to work on a likeness of Hilda Bickerstaff. It was well for their friendship,

that the unconscious model was not present to behold the result. It was not flattering; in fact, it was grotesque beyond description, but there was a suggestion about the squat badly-drawn figure, an expression in the smeary, hectic face, which was unmistakable in its resemblance to the subject.

Philip and Mary shrieked with laughter over it, then hastily painted it out, lest the good woman might come upon it, and feel hurt at the unintended caricature. Philip honestly praised it, however, at the same time correcting, as far as he could, her most glaring mistakes in drawing, and idiosyncrasies of color, and Mary was emboldened to continue. She purchased paints and canvas of her own, and Philip, under a strict pledge of secrecy — for she desperately feared the good-natured chaffing and ridicule of the others — gave her lessons, in their spare moments.

She was forced to acknowledge to herself that she would never become an artist,—the trick of expression, of likeness, was there, but the drawing was hopelessly bad, and color blending utterly beyond her power and skill.

One wintry afternoon, however, when a cold drizzle of rain without had made welcome a cheery blaze upon the hearth, she was looking over the contents of one of her trunks, when she came upon a rough sketch she had made years before,—the sketch of Rhoda Dering's tragic face, as she had last seen it on the steamer, and which had haunted her when the news of the unfortunate woman's death reached her. The sight of it brought back a shock of remembrance, and on a sudden impulse she pinned it up on her easel, beside a fresh canvas, and set to work to reproduce it in colors. She

worked quickly until darkness set in, memory supplying the deficiencies of the hasty sketch, and as she blocked in the well-remembered face, her thoughts lingered on their brief but intimate friendship. How much wiser she was now, how much more fitted to comprehend the depth of the other's suffering, than she had been four years before! If she could but see her now, if she could comfort her, in the light of her greater knowledge and deeper understanding, perhaps she might have been able to turn her from her despairing purpose, to give her courage to face the future. But would it have been wise, or kind? Had not events taken the best course for the broken-hearted woman, after all?

Philip Giron, stopping in at dusk, found her still feverishly at work, and with an exclamation of surprised interest, he surveyed the result of her labors. Then he took a hand himself, accentuating a line here and there, toning down a high-light, deepening and blending a shadow, till Rhoda Dering herself seemed to be gazing out at them, with her brooding, grief-haunted eyes, and shadowy, pathetic smile. Unfinished as it was, Mary feared to mar its startling likeness by another touch of the brush, but stood it upon the top of a bookcase and there Hilda Bickerstaff came upon it, a day or two later.

"My word! What a study!" she exclaimed. "How in the world did you come by it?"

"It — it is the likeness of a woman I knew," Mary replied hesitatingly, loath to confess that it was her own handiwork.

"It's a lovely face,—but such a sorrowful one! There must have been a story behind those eyes!"

"There was."

"Who did it? The subject's been cleverly worked out — few lines, and each one significant."

"I did.— That is I took it from a hasty sketch I made once, and Philip touched it up for me."

"You sly puss! To think of your hiding this talent of yours up your sleeve, all this while, and no one but Philip the wiser! It's wonderfully done, my dear, and the face is wonderful, as well. She might have sat for Doré, might she not? She looks like a visualization of the soul of the damned!"

"She had suffered,— terribly. And it was too much for her in the end.— Here is the first rough sketch. I made it from memory, when I learned that she had — killed herself."

"Poor creature! Life's a beastly rotten game sometimes, isn't it? The weaklings get trodden on, or kicked out from under foot,— the weaklings, or those who give too much."

Mary looked at the square, commonplace figure before her half fearfully. How far beneath the surface could those sharp, discerning eyes peer! — Or was it that she had unconsciously revealed the keynote of Rhoda Dering's life, in the wistful mouth and yearning eyes?

She evinced an unmistakable disinclination to continue the subject, and the Englishwoman dismissed it, tactfully. The sketch was put away, and the picture hung in a shadowed corner and all but forgotten.

Some weeks later, when Christmas was fast approaching, and a quick flurry of snow had sent every one scurrying indoors, Nina entered the big studio, where Mary sat curled up in a great chair before the crackling blaze on the hearth, buried in a book, to say that

she had encountered Monsieur Badin in the courtyard when she was returning from the epicerie. He was entertaining a friend, an American gentleman, he had said, and he begged leave to bring him in, and present him, later.

With a sigh, Mary closed her book and set about helping Nina to set to rights the comfortable disorder of the studio. She was in a brooding, introspective mood, and disinclined for the effort of making conversation with a stranger, but when Monsieur Badin arrived with his guest, she forgot herself, and her slightly ungracious humor, in her interest in the newcomer.

Mr. Norcross, as he had been presented to her, was a dark strikingly good-looking man, verging on middle age. The easy dignity of his bearing, the firm square jaw, and penetrating, level, grey eyes denoted the underlying strength and poise of the man who had found himself. His voice, full-throated, and sonorously rounded, indicated the public speaker, although the simple words he chose in conventional greeting, conveyed no suspicion of teratology. His face was vaguely familiar—not as one she had known, but rather as one she had seen reproduced in newspapers—perhaps in cartoons. And the name,—Norcross,—where had she heard it before? She concluded that he must be a public man of some sort, prominent in affairs at home, but she could not place him in her mind.

She gave them tea, and afterward Monsieur Badin went up to his studio to get some sketches of a group a colleague of his was executing, and which they had been discussing, leaving his friend alone with Mary.

She was chatting easily of some trivialities, and her guest's abstracted gaze was wandering about the dim

studio, when suddenly his eyes fell upon the shadowy corner where hung the picture of Rhoda Dering, and rested there for an instant. Then he sprang to his feet, regardless of the interruption to his hostess, and approached the picture as if the sad eyes drew him, in spite of himself.

Standing there before it, motionless, tense, he gazed for a long moment, while Mary watched him in speechless amazement. Why should the picture have so impressed him,—have actually startled him into complete forgetfulness of himself and his surroundings? Could he, by any chance, have known Rhoda Dering?

As she was pondering, he turned slowly to her, and at one glimpse of his changed face a flash of intuition came to her, and for an instant her heart stood still. Norcross,—he was Waldon Norcross, the lieutenant-governor—!

But he had broken the strained silence.

"How—how did you come by that picture?" his voice grated on the twilight stillness of the studio. "What artist painted it? Forgive my seeming rudeness, Miss Tinney, but I must know!"

"I painted it myself, from memory," she replied coldly, adding, "The subject was a friend of mine."

"You! You painted it,—you knew her! Will you pardon me if I ask where you met her? How long ago?" The queries seemed forced from him without his volition.

"On a steamer coming from America, four years ago last September. Her name was Rhoda Dering.—Perhaps you know her." She could not resist the last remark, watching his moved face with curious impersonality as she spoke.

"Yes,—I knew her." How his voice lingered over

the words! "She was a very dear friend of mine. Her death—I presume you know of it?—was a great shock to me. Miss Tinney, I—I must have that picture! You are an artist, aren't you,—I will gladly pay any price you name—"

"The picture is not for sale, Mr. Norcross." Mary's cold voice took on a note of determined finality. "I am not an artist,—if this room were lighted, and you were any judge of painting, you would not have made such a mistake as to suppose me one. The picture is a mere daub, made from a hasty sketch drawn from memory some years ago. It is extremely badly done, but the likeness is there. Miss Dering was my friend, and no amount of money could purchase it."

There was a pause, and then Mr. Norcross approached her, gravely.

"Miss Tinney, did you by any chance learn Rhoda Dering's story?" he asked, very gently. "Did she confide in you?"

"I know how she died, and — why," Mary returned. It annoyed her that she should be impressed by the pathos in his mellow voice, that a sudden pity for his evident suffering should steal insidiously over her. Pity! What pity had he shown when he had taken the life of a good woman and made of it what he willed, only to cast her off when his need of her was at an end? It was just that he should suffer, for he had killed her as surely as if he had held the revolver at her breast.

"She told you, then?" his voice was scarcely audible.

"The circumstances of her departure from America? Yes, and of her previous life for some years, mentioning no names. But when the announcement of

her death appeared in the papers, together with some particulars which she had not related to me, I was forced to connect them in my own mind with what she had told me, and draw my own conclusion.— You are Waldon Norcross, are you not?" she added the query deliberately, and the man before her suddenly lost his self-control. Dropping into a chair, he covered his face with his hands, and for a space there was silence once more. At last, he raised his head, and Mary saw in his eyes that the man was shaken to the depths of his soul by this reopening of an old wound.

"Yes," he said slowly. "I am Waldon Norcross. I am the man who is responsible for her death. If you know the whole story,— if you know the coward's part I played, even at the last, when I tricked her into leaving me, because I hadn't the courage to face the consequence of what I meant to do, you know what I am, what I know myself to be! I struggled, argued with myself, made excuses for myself in my own mind for the break which seemed necessary to my career,— but I couldn't go to her like a man, and tell her! Instead, I sent her out, alone into the world, believing in me, in my love for her, until the very last! You cannot condemn me, as I condemn myself,— you cannot loathe me as I loathe myself!

"She had been so unselfish, effacing herself always for me and my life work, that she had taught me to regard my career as the only thing in the world which counted — she had imbued me with the idea that nothing must be allowed to stand in its way! And when the great opportunity came to me, when the goal for which I had been striving all my life was before me, almost within my grasp, I felt in my blind egotism and pride that nothing else mattered, that everything must

give way before that one paramount thing. Our happiness, our love, her years of patient self-sacrifice and immolation,—what did they count against the fulfilment of my ambition? Great God! If I could have known, if only a glimpse of the futility, the mockery of it all, could have been vouchsafed to me!

“I know what you must think of me, and justly,—but if I could make you believe that I have suffered, if I could make you understand a little of what the realization of that which I have done means to me, you would pity me, instead of utterly condemning. I am asking for no sympathy,—I desire none. Words are meaningless and cheap, now, I know, and nothing can make them of any avail, but ah! I would give all these empty honors which have come to me, if I could bring her back,—if I could undo what I have done!”

His voice broke, and he rose and walked swiftly to the window, where he stood gazing out with unseeing eyes at the wind-driven snow swirling about in the little courtyard. Twilight deepened and the shadows crept from their corners and stole over the room, and Mary still sat motionless in her chair, her eyes fixed upon the dying fire on the hearth.

Then, with a long sigh of decision she rose and approached the picture of Rhoda Dering, reaching up gently and taking it down from the wall. Then, with it in her hands, she went to him.

“Mr. Norcross, you may have the picture,” she said very softly. “I believe that you have suffered, too, and I am sorry. After all, it is a matter between you two, alone. She loved you, and — she would have forgiven.”

He took both her hands in his, the picture held between them.

"You are — kind," he said, huskily. "I shall not attempt to thank you,— you have done more for me, in giving me this, than I can ever tell you, more than I can ever repay. And you have given me my first word of comfort in all these weary years. She loved me — she would have forgiven. If there is a hereafter, Miss Tinney, she must understand everything now,— she knows what expiation I have made!"

There was a cheery knock on the door, and Monsieur Badin entered, a portfolio beneath his arm.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed, peering through the gloom at the two by the window. "Zat concierge! She clean, and clean, and clean, and when she have feeneesh, parbleu! I can find nosing! She weel tr-trot about in heaven wiz a mop and a broom, sans doubt, zat Madame Heloise!"

CHAPTER XV

MARY's interest in painting waned after the incident of Rhoda Dering's picture. She tried long and faithfully to make a new reproduction of the face from the rough draft, but although she put her best effort in the task, the likeness would not come. It seemed to her that it was like a trick which was once discovered, and now lost to her again. She copied the drawing of the original painstakingly, but when finished the face was lifeless and simpering, with none of the compelling power of brooding despair which had dominated the first.

Waldon Norcross never came again, but on the eve of his departure from Paris, a package came to her from a silversmith on the rue de la Paix, and a note from the American himself. The letter was a mere expression of gratitude for her great kindness, but beneath the simple dignity of the words he had chosen, Mary could read much. The package contained a tall, slender, silver vase, graceful and exquisitely chaste. In the austerity of its conception and purity of line, it reminded Mary of some of the sacred vessels of silver and gold, which she had seen on the altars in cathedrals, and she chose to consider it not a gift to herself, but an offering to the memory of the girl who was dead, a sort of memorial to their brief friendship. A few days later, Mary read in the *Journal* of the arrival in Cannes of "Monsieur Waldon Norcross, Madame Norcross, et enfant." So he had fulfilled his

intention of marrying the woman who could further his ambitions,—and now there was a little child! Mary wondered if the young mother was happy, if no suspicion ever crossed her mind that her husband's heart was not in her keeping, but buried in an ineffaceable memory, that the very child she had borne him perhaps augmented, rather than assuaged, an old pain. And Mary began dimly to comprehend his martyrdom, — self-inflicted, and for which he had only himself to blame, but a very real martyrdom, nevertheless,— what he must have suffered, and was still daily, hourly suffering, and would inevitably so suffer, as long as memory was vouchsafed him. The thought of what Rhoda Dering had been called upon to endure, also, returned to her, and she was overwhelmed with the pity of it all, the needless pain, the three lives virtually sacrificed on the inexorable altar of the man's ruthless ambition.

The ensuing weeks passed uneventfully, and Mary's interest in her studies grew with her advancing knowledge. As she came more and more in contact with the people of the Quartier, and made friends among them, her contentment and happiness increased. In vain she reminded herself sternly that some day she must put all this behind her, and go out into the world again, back to the old life which she loathed unspeakably, but from which there could be no recourse. After all, she had no real place among these people, who accepted her in kindly camaraderie,— no talent, no life-work. To exist for the rest of her life on her slender capital was out of the question, and she had no other resource than the physical attributes with which nature had provided her, the means, however odious, which had served her in the past.

Opportunities for romance were not lacking in her present environment. Her peculiar, involuntary appeal to the senses was not lost upon more than one susceptible member of her coterie, but when Mary was made aware of any tendency toward sentiment, she dexterously but unmistakably placed a taboo upon it. She was arrogantly confident of her invulnerability. An affair of the heart was beyond the pale of her imaginings, it could only prove a stumbling-block in the scheme of life which she had outlined for herself. She would go forth when the need came, fancy free, and thoroughly equipped mentally for the sterner issues of the struggle, and when fortune had poured into her lap sufficient wealth to enable her to live her life to please herself, she would return to her own country, and begin anew.

She had a natural linguistic gift, and her wandering existence with Baron Iverskoi had given her opportunities to acquire a smattering of Spanish, German and Italian, besides French, in which last she had, of course, perfected herself. This attribute augmented her popularity with the cosmopolitan group of which she had become a part.

Among her newer acquaintances was a Spanish painter of some renown, a moody, idealistic individual, with the true soul of the artist, who deliberately turned his back upon the masterly delineation of voluptuous types of Andalusian beauty, which had brought him deserved fame, and sought to give expression, in symbolic form, of the subtle phantasies which flooded his mystic brain.

Something in the girl's repression, some note of hidden strength and suggestion of latent power and slumbering passion in her long, heavy-lidded, sullen eyes,

fascinated Senor Delvajo from the first moment of their meeting, and he studied her with absorbed interest, while Mary, quite unconscious of the impression she had created, looked upon him as a new and wholly delightful type.

Their friendship quickly progressed to a stage of pseudo intimacy of thought, and he revealed to her what he could express of his nebulous aspirations. Her mind, as yet unopened to the full comprehension of a higher ideality, nevertheless intuitively grasped something of that which he sought to convey, and her ready and sympathetic response fired him with inspiration. When he somewhat tentatively asked her to pose for him, she acquiesced with enthusiasm, and eagerly awaited the hour appointed for her first sitting.

She had supposed that the picture was to be a mere portrait, and was therefore rather mystified when Senor Delvajo made his plans known to her. He posed her in a mediæval, clinging, slate-grey gown of heavy lustreless silk, reclining easily on a great stone settle, with her chin resting upon her folded hands and her unfathomable eyes gazing steadily out upon him. The background was sombre, the foreground in neutral greys, and the only high-lights were in her glorious hair, the dull gold of her girdle, and in her eyes.

Privately, she was distinctly disappointed,—the gown, the pose, the gloom of the picture lightened only by a radiance which seemed to come from within the figure in the foreground, conveyed nothing to her mind. She supposed it to be symbolical of something, in his mind, but she would have preferred being done in a modern gown, in a brilliant, rich setting. However, she was diverted by the novel experience of posing, and the gradual but sure growth of the picture each day,

beneath the strokes of his magic brush, fascinated her.

His studio was a great, bare place — old paint tubes, palettes, mahl-sticks, and bits of faded, barbaric-hued drapery, were thrown about in hopeless confusion, and fragmentary sketches were piled everywhere. It was purely a workshop, with no touch of beauty anywhere, wholly lacking in the delicate influence of a woman's hand, and yet it had an attractiveness, a certain appeal of its own. Others felt it, also,—brother artists and sculptors, who found time to leave their own work, and toil up the steep pitch of the narrow stairway for a pipe and a chat with their friend.

Often, if inspiration assailed him, and footsteps were heard upon the rickety landing, he would hold up his slim dark hand to warn her to make no sound, and they would sit in ludicrously strained silence until the thunderous knocks upon the door had ceased, and the footsteps died away. Or, if he happened to be in the mood, he would shout a request for the name of his caller through the door, and, mutely demanding her permission, would invite him in. Then would follow delightful hours which the girl would store away in her memory; golden hours of the most perfect congeniality, when famous men whose names were by-words in the world of art on two continents put aside the glamour of their own achievements, to praise, and censure, and argue, and jest in the utmost peace and contentment of soul. She would sit, sometimes wholly forgotten, drinking in the wit and wisdom of these sentient minds, lost to self in the atmosphere surrounding her.

Sometimes, too, when the long hours of posing wearied her, or the early winter twilight fell apace, he would make tea in the battered old brass kettle on the glowing coals in the grate, and they would spend a cosy hour

together, laughing and chattering like children at a feast.

Meantime, winter was far advanced, and the picture grew magically, until the woman in the shadowy gown seemed to stand forth, quick with life, and the smouldering eyes leapt out and gripped the beholder with the all-compelling fixity of their gaze.

One day, Mary was late for her appointment with Senor Delvajo. She had been unavoidably detained at home until past the hour for her sitting, and she hurriedly ascended the steep flight of stairs leading to his studio. As she paused on the landing to regain her breath before knocking upon the door, she heard voices within,— Senor Delvajo's and another which she did not recognize,— and quite involuntarily she listened.

"Yes, a find!" Senor Delvajo was saying. "A marvellous creature, my dear Daingerfield,— a type for which I have long searched in vain. I call the picture 'La Toute-Puissance.'"

"'Potentiality,'" the stranger translated. His voice, low, and rich, and mellow, sounded musically upon her ears. "Yes, it is all that, and more. It's a wonderful face, Delvajo,— what strength, what capacity for passion! She's just what I want for my Lilith. Who is she?"

"She's not a model, my dear fellow. She's an Americain studying literature of the French, here in the Quartier. Just a — what do you say? — a hobby, I think. She seems possessed of some wealth,— one can never comprehend the ideas, the idiosyncrasies of your compatriots. I persuaded her to sit for me,— for mere friendship, you understand." Senor Delvajo's explanation was bland.

"But she shall pose for me,—she must! There is not another woman in Paris who so embodies my conception of Lilith." Mary, on the landing, smiled to herself at the impatient, dominating tone. The egotism of genius! "Must," indeed! It was like a challenge, a gauntlet cast at her feet. "Compatriot," Senor Delvajo had said;—she would show this domineering countryman of hers, if the opportunity came, that it would be no small matter to persuade her to acquiesce in his desire. But Senor Delvajo was speaking again, in half jocular expostulation.

"She may be willing to pose for you, of course, my dear Daingerfield,—but who can presage the whims and vagaries of the feminine mind? Should she decline, you cannot, in this enlightened era, seize upon her like a cave man, and bear her off to your stronghold in the rue Notre Dame des Champs!"

"She cannot decline, Delvajo,—she shall not be allowed to decline! She is my Lilith in the flesh! Shall my statue, my masterpiece, be lost to the world because of a woman's whim? Who is she?"

Like a war-horse, scenting battle, Mary flung up her head, with quivering nostrils, and a red spot glowing in each cheek, and knocked sharply upon the door.

There was a sudden silence within, and then Senor Delvajo's raised voice, bidding her enter.

She stood in the doorway for an instant, surveying them both, and her eyes met those of the stranger. There ensued an electric pause, and Mary, to her unspeakable annoyance, felt an unbidden flush arise in her cheeks, beneath the steady gaze, and her own eyes wavered and fell.

Senor Delvajo rose quickly from his chair.

"Mademoiselle Tinnee, allow me to present my very great friend Monsieur Richard Daingerfield."

"Mademoiselle," the stranger bowed perfunctorily, in response to her cold acknowledgment of the introduction, but his eyes never left her face, and during the ensuing conversation she was uncomfortably aware of his appraising scrutiny. She felt a natural impulse to regard him in return, but kept her eyes obstinately averted.

Her initial glance had revealed a man of an utterly different type from the many she had encountered in the course of her peregrinating career. The first impression which he conveyed to her was that of bigness, — he was colossally built, long of limb, and mighty of chest. His great head was well set upon his massive shoulders, he wore a shaggy beard, and his shock of hair although lustreless, was as tawny as Mary's own.

"Monsieur Daingerfield is a countryman of yours, Mademoiselle," Senor Delvajo was saying. "Like our friend Monsieur Badin, he eschews the paintbrush and canvas for the chisel and a block of marble, but he has done us the honor of approving of our picture."

"Yes?" replied Mary, coldly. Then, pointedly, she added, "I am sorry to be late for the sitting, Monsieur Delvajo, but I was detained. I shall be ready in a moment." And she turned toward the dressing screen. She could not resist the impulse to be rude to this over confident stranger, whose eyes took on a look of quiet amusement, as if he discerned her pique and divined its cause.

"We will not be in haste, Mademoiselle!" remarked Senor Delvajo, with a glance toward his friend. "It is bitterly cold to-day,—take this big chair here by

the fire, and I will make some tea. Monsieur Daingerfield had been telling me of a statue on which he is engaged,—you will be interested, I am sure, to hear of it, also.”

Mary, suddenly ashamed of her little outburst of rudeness, sank down in the low chair, and began drawing off her gloves. After all, they were mere children at heart, these geniuses — she had thrown herself into contact with so many of them in the last few months, that she had learned to take their supreme egotism as part of the artistic temperament. It was foolish of her to take umbrage at this stranger's calm assumption that she must comply, willy-nilly, with his wishes. She turned graciously to him, but did not meet his eyes.

“So you know my neighbor, Monsieur Badin?” she asked, ignoring the lead Senor Delvajo had given her, sure that, like his brother artists, the sculptor would inevitably introduce the subject of his own work in good time.

“Yes, a splendid old fellow, isn't he? — A neighbor of yours, Miss Tinney?”

“I have a studio near his, in the Impasse du Maine.— Have you seen his latest group for the Lille Memorial?”

“No, I haven't, I must look him up.— You are interested in sculpture?”

“I am interested, naturally, in the work of my friends,” Mary replied, evasively.

“But not in art for art's sake,—I see,” the stranger smiled — a warm, winning smile, which lightened his own countenance for a flash and was gone. “Our craft, especially, is seldom interesting to those

who are not of it, unlike yours, for instance, Delvajo. Color, warmth, suggestion,—all these appeal more to the lay mind than a mere shapeless mass of stone.”

“But you—you seem to be the real creators, after all—we but picture on a canvas that which we see—with the heart, the mind, as well as the eyes, it is true, but we are, in the end, reproducers. And if you have not color, not atmosphere, you have form, in its highest sense.” Delvajo spoke eagerly, generously, but his eyes lingered caressingly on the canvasses piled in a corner.

“It does not seem to me,” Mary had forgotten herself; her eyes shone and the lovely color had deepened in her face, “that a sculptor creates—he seems only to chisel away the stone which imprisons some beautiful thing. When I go to Monsieur Badin’s great studio, or Roguet’s, or Cassenet’s, and see an unfinished statue, like some wonderful, colossal creature struggling to free itself, I long to tear and dig at the marble with my bare hands and release it!”

“Will you come to my studio? Will you let me show you some of my work?” the stranger spoke quietly, compellingly. There was more of command in his voice than a question. “Delvajo shall bring you to-morrow.”

“Sometime, perhaps. I should be delighted. But to-morrow—” Mary demurred, in sudden reluctance incomprehensible to herself, adding somewhat lamely, “the—the picture, you know! Senor Delvajo is most anxious to complete, and I—I have not much time for posing.”

“But you will come for an hour,—Delvajo, you will be generous!” the stranger turned, in his authoritative way, to his friend. “‘La Toute-Puissance’ is so

nearly finished, you can spare an afternoon. You have not seen my Viking, and Miss Tinney will, I am sure, be interested in that Woman-and-Tigress group, although it's a rank failure."

"Failure!" Senor Delvajo remonstrated. "Impossible! It is wonderful! The critics —"

"The critics! Bah! They took the woman for an unclothed animal trainer! They are like moles — can they expound to others the truth, the crux of an inspiration they are themselves incapable of comprehending? I failed — but somehow I cannot destroy it. The tigress, at least, seems real to me."

"But the conception is a marvellous one!" insisted the artist. "How could you have failed?"

"The model," returned the other, briefly. "She was a glorious, sensuous looking creature, but she had the soul of a sheep! — Then you will come?"

"Gladly — if it is Mademoiselle's pleasure." Senor Delvajo turned to Mary deprecatingly. "The Viking — I have great desire to see it. It goes to America soon, does it not?"

"Next week. And a pork-packer will set it up appropriately in an Italian garden on Lake Erie, I have no doubt." The sculptor made a little grimace which twitched his beard, and created a fine net-work of lines at the corners of his eyes. "Koehler, the dealer, of Chicago, bought it at the last exhibition. The critics of the lake city will cavil at it, I suppose, to show their sturdy, American independence of European opinion and approval, and fair artistic daughters of the Middle West will conclude that the Viking is a very ugly old man." He rose, turning suddenly to Mary. "You will come, Miss Tinney?"

"Thank you, yes, Mr. Daingerfield. I shall be

glad —" she stammered her acceptance. She was conscious then, only of the overpowering size of the man. As he stood before her, he dwarfed the Spaniard's slim elegance of figure, and seemed to fill the studio, large as it was.

Somehow, try as she might, she could not dismiss the sculptor from her thoughts that evening. He had made a profound impression upon her, which was not easily to be shaken off. The man's personality was so dominant, so forceful, the breadth and bigness of him, the strength of his will seemed so sweeping that it crowded everything else from her thoughts as puny and inconsiderable. She felt an unaccountable sense of almost fear toward him. She was provoked with herself, too, for the eagerness with which she looked forward to the next day. He was undoubtedly a clever man, possibly a genius, and his work would be well worth seeing, but that would be the limit of their acquaintance. She told herself that his friendship would not be worth while cultivating, they could not meet on any congenial ground,—had not one interest in common. Why then, did the man so persistently intrude himself upon her thoughts? He was a new and curious type,—she had met scores of men in the last few years, toward the majority of whom she had been as utterly indifferent as though they had not existed. Those whom she had liked, even casually, had all appealed to her more than this egotistical, self-assured, coldly arrogant person! She felt that she could very easily dislike this countryman of hers most heartily. And yet — there was something about him, his overwhelming masculinity, perhaps, which was compelling in its magnetism.

The following afternoon Senor Delvajo presented

himself at her studio, and as they walked to the rue Notre Dame des Champs, he told her what he knew of the man who was to be their host.

"He is a wonderful person, this Monsieur Daingerfield," he remarked. "He has genius, his modelling is superb! He will be the great man of his time, if he does not burn himself out. His temperament, you understand, Mademoiselle Tinnee,—it is all flame and ice! His—how do you say?—his nature, is a hot-bed of contradictions. He will work like a madman, showing no mercy to his models or himself. Then quite suddenly, if his inspiration baffles him for the moment, or something goes wrong, he will close his studio abruptly, and disappear for weeks, returning only when his genius conquers him. You must not let his moods disconcert you, Mademoiselle. When he is aroused, he is sometimes of a violence unbelievable, of which he is quite unconscious. He makes many friends, but some enemies, because all cannot understand him. I myself,—I am his friend, and I love him, but to me he is quite, quite incomprehensible! You—you will perhaps understand him, Mademoiselle, and if you do, you will love him, as I."

Mary smiled to herself, but made no reply.

Richard Daingerfield met them on the threshold of his workshop—a vast, barn-like chamber, in which stood colossal figures and heroic groups, ghostly in their canvas wrappings, which were intersected sharply by the framework of the scaffolding. Mary looked about her in wonderment. She had never seen so huge a place—Monsieur Badin and the other sculptors she knew made only their busts and smaller figures and bas-reliefs in their studios, executing their gigantic groups elsewhere.

Here, when the canvas which swathed them was removed, Mary beheld herculean figures, their massive sinewy limbs and classically moulded features sentient with life. Near her was a wrestling group, their rippling muscles standing out in knots on their splendid limbs and backs, their faces contorted in the grimace of supremest physical effort; there, lay a sleepy woman, her head pillowed upon one rounded arm, the swelling breasts and long, sensuous lines of her glorious body more accentuated than concealed by her clinging draperies. Mary could almost see the gentle rise and fall of her bosom, the quivering of her delicate limbs as some amorous dream assailed her slumbers. In a huddled mass in a corner lay a shattered bust, the fragments grotesque in their lofty tranquillity of expression amid the ruin. Nearby lay a mallet, where it had been flung from a violent hand;—a significant evidence of the temperament to which Senor Delvajo had alluded.

The Viking stood under the north light, a majestic figure, stalwart and grim, erect under the crown of his years, his Spartan face eloquent of victory in his life-long battle with the malign fury of the deep. The relentless determination, the indomitable strength of will in the powerful rugged countenance seized upon the girl's impressionable brain and for long moments she stood rapt before it, her ears closed to the enthusiastic encomiums of Senor Delvajo.

Then suddenly it was borne in upon her consciousness that the sculptor was scrutinizing her in his mad-deningly dispassionate way, watching every play of expression, every changing shade upon her face, with the intentness of a scientist studying a chart.

A mask-like shadow dropped over her face and she turned away, her lids narrowed to conceal the resent-

ment snapping fire in her topaz eyes. So that was his object in asking her to his studio—to analyze the effect of the impression created on her by his genius, to use her generous response, her quick appreciation, to influence her to his own ends. And she had come tamely, in answer to his bidding, had walked blindly into the trap he had set for her, in his sublimity of self-interest. Ah, but she would show him!—

He followed her, as she moved slowly off.

“Here is the group of which I spoke yesterday, Miss Tinney,—the Woman and Tigress. You will readily see why it failed to embody my conception.”

Without resorting to ridiculous, uncalled-for rudeness, she could not ignore the man, but she turned slowly, her eyes deliberately veiled in indifference, in the direction his gesture indicated.

There crouched the tigress, a magnificent specimen of her breed, her massive head lowered sullenly, her tail arrested in a twitch of wrathful subjection, her claws unsheathed and outspread like a cat's, her ears flattened against the velvet undulations of her great neck; and sprawled across her flank in fearless abandon, lay the splendid, nude body of a woman, one arm outflung in careless sovereignty over the broad back of the subjugated brute. It was superb, incomparable—until one looked in the face of the woman. That was a mere morsel of flesh, perfect in contour, but utterly expressionless, torpid and meaningless as the face of an idol. It seemed almost a profanation, a prostitution of his genius, that his hand should have chiseled that abortive thing. The girl's petty resentment was lost in the pity of it.

“You understand?”

She turned to him in impulsive sympathy.

"It is a wicked thing — a sacrilege! How could you have done it!"

Richard Daingerfield shrugged his shoulders in helpless disgust.

"What could I do? It was the model — she had no sensibility, no soul. — Miss Tinney, I have long desired to execute a certain thing — to put into imperishable marble my conception of Lilith. You know the legend of her? This wretched failure of mine has taught me the futility of attempting the work without a model who could be imbued with my inspiration. I have searched for such a model in vain, and relegated my masterpiece finally to the place of unattainable things, in despair of finding her.

"Miss Tinney, I think I have come upon her, at last! After years of futile search, I have discovered her, the embodiment of my Lilith! — Will you pose for me? I know the audacity of my request, — I know that you are not a professional model, that you consented to sit for Delvajo as a favor to a friend, and that I am practically a stranger to you, but I beg you most earnestly to grant my request."

He had come close to her, his brown eyes holding an appeal which reminded her irresistibly of a faithful dog's. She felt the power of his magnetism, her senses leaped to meet the flame of his desire, but she steeled herself against the traitorous capitulation of her will.

"I am sorry, Mr. Daingerfield," she said coldly, not daring to meet his eyes. "My posing for Senor Delvajo was, as you say, a favor to a friend. It is very tiring, and I find that it bores me, besides, my time must be devoted to my work, my studio. My consenting to sit for the picture in the first place, was the result of a mere — whim."

Richard Daingerfield's eyes grew ominous.

"So you were eavesdropping yesterday, Miss Tinney, as I imagined. That I suppose, is a feminine prerogative which must go unchallenged. But surely you are not so small-minded, so narrow in your point of view, that you will allow a petty resentment for a few careless words of mine to influence you to refuse my request! Without a model I am helpless,—I have searched all Paris for months and found no woman who can aid me to create my masterpiece, but you. I am utterly at your mercy! Will you let a mere matter of pique stand in the way?"

Mary's face reddened, but she forced her angry eyes to meet his.

"I am sorry," she repeated, "I am sensible of the honor you do me, Mr. Daingerfield, but what you ask of me, is out of the question. I regret that I cannot help you."

He bowed in silent acquiescence to her decision, but as he stepped back, his face was a study of anger, and bitter disappointment. Mary felt no elation at her triumph, but rather an accountable sense of shame. She summoned Senor Delvajo quickly, and took her departure, fearing every moment that her spiteful resolution would give away before the dumb desire in her host's eyes. Had she not overheard those arrogantly contemptuous words, how eagerly she would have responded to his desire, how honored she would have felt that he had chosen her as the personification of his inspiration! Yet after all it was an unheard-of thing which he asked so casually of her, a stranger! The audacity of it was almost incredible—no one but a creature blinded by supreme egotism would have suggested it so precipitately.

Nevertheless, she was conscious of a covert hope that he would pursue the matter,—that he would come to her, more humbly even than before, and beg her to reconsider her refusal to help him. She told herself that her second victory would be sweeter than the first,—she rehearsed in her mind the problematic scene, and his ultimate departure, crushed beneath the weight of her sarcasm. But in her heart, she knew that if he asked her again, she would consent; if he came to her she would capitulate, she would be unable to withstand the spell of his magnetism.

The weeks passed, however, and he did not appear, nor did he come again to Senor Delvajo's studio. When, after a mental struggle she voiced a tentative question concerning him to the Spaniard one day, it was only to be told that he had disappeared again. Something had occurred to thwart him, and in one of his customary rages he had closed his studio and vanished, *le bon Dieu* alone knew where. *Sapristi!* he was of a temperament impossible, this American!

Meanwhile, the picture was at last finished and sent away, and after interminable weeks of almost unbearable suspense, Senor Delvajo rushed in one day in a frenzy of triumph and delirious joy, to announce the scarcely believable news—*La Toute-Puissance* had been accepted for the Salon!

Mary felt an inexplicable reluctance to viewing it in public, and she would not go until the exhibition was well on. She chose a dull, rainy afternoon, and went alone, heavily veiled and in a simple severe tailor-made *trotteur*. The picture, for a wonder, had been skilfully and judiciously hung, just at the right angle for the light to fall softly upon it, bringing out in startling

intensity the sombre potency of the smouldering eyes.

Mary gasped at the bold realism of it,—the woman in grey seemed to gaze back at her as from a mirror, calm and inscrutable, from the unfathomable depths of her eyes. Unconscious of her movement she flung back from her face the enveloping folds of the heavy veil, and studied the painting as if every brush-stroke was not already familiar to her.

As she stood regarding it, she gradually became aware of the presence of another, and felt an odd sense of familiarity in the gaze which was bent upon her. Irresistibly, she raised her eyes, and for the third time in her life met those of the stranger whose path seemed so inexplicably destined to cross hers,—the man who had created such an ineffaceable impression upon her at Sheepshead, long years before, whose look had challenged hers across the gaming-table at Monte Carlo. He looked older, more world-worn, the little tell-tale lines had formed beneath his steel-grey eyes and deepened about his mouth, and the scar across his cheekbone had faded perceptibly. But his expression had not changed,—the good-humored cynicism still lingered, the impersonal interest of the bystander, quickened now by instant recognition, leaped in his eyes. He glanced from her to the picture, evidently recognizing at once the significance of the likeness, and seeming on the point of impulsive speech. Then, with an afterthought he checked himself, and stepped back, his eyes still fastened upon her.

Mary dropped her veil, and moved off slowly,—the moment had passed, but the incomprehensible impression returned again, that this man, whoever he might be, was destined to be of vital moment to her in

the future,— that on him alone would rest some crisis in her career. It passed as swiftly as it had come, but the curious sensation of his nearness prevailed, that, and a prescience of suspense, of waiting. When was this man to enter her life?

CHAPTER XVI

THE spring had come, and still Mary lingered in the Impasse du Maine, although for weeks she had told herself that it was time for her to start out afresh. Much as she loved the life of the Quartier, she could not define to herself the motive which actuated her to put off her departure from month to month. She reasoned with herself, argued, struggled,— but stayed on. It was natural, she told herself, that she should shrink in loathing from the life which for a time she had put from her, and that she should cling to the happiness and peace of mind she had found in this little colony of joyous, happy-go-lucky congenial spirits, although she had known from the beginning that this could be but an interim, that she must go on as she had begun, until she had worked out her own material salvation. It was utterly contrary to her strong-willed nature to shirk the inevitable, and her present mood was inexplicable to her. There was no especial interest which held her here against her better judgment,— no matter of sentiment to interfere between her and the future career she had planned. Surely it could not be the ever-recurrent thought of the sculptor,— the American, Richard Daingerfield,— whom she had treated so cavalierly during their brief acquaintance, which retarded her, nor the never-acknowledged hope that he would return and seek her out and once more ask of her the great service which she, in petty spite, had denied him. She could not imagine what kept the man so per-

sistently in her mind,— he had undoubtedly forgotten her very existence long before this. She had drifted across his path, and he thought he could perhaps make use of her — when she refused, he had gone his way. And yet — suppose in his great need, he should pocket his pride, and come once more to beg her to pose for his masterpiece, and should find her gone? She told herself angrily that the man was less than nothing to her, that his disappointment was no concern of hers — it was absurd of him to have said that without her his Lilith could not be created! Surely, in the army of professional models in the Quartier, he could find many who would fill his requirements. The man might be a genius, but he was a perfect bear, rough, and uncivil, and half-savage,— she would bother her head no more about him.

Nevertheless, she could not put from her so easily the impression the man's personality had made upon her thoughts. She wanted to ask Senor Delvajo about him when they met, but each time for some unknown reason her courage failed. Once, she actually found herself on the rue Notre Dame des Champs, within a stone's throw of the sculptor's studio. She turned and fled incontinently back to her stronghold in the Impasse du Maine, asking wrathfully of her own intelligence why she was deliberately making such a fool of herself. She tried to think that it was mere accident which had turned her steps in that direction, but she was inherently too honest, too accustomed to looking things squarely in the face, for such a weak excuse, an abortive attempt at self-deception to suffice. She was scornfully contemptuous, and thoroughly disgusted with herself, and in a sudden fit of rebellion against this strange mood which obsessed her, she ordered Nina to prepare

for their departure. The professor had returned to his old home in the south of France, her lessons were over, the Paris of which she had been a part should know her once again.

Nina, on whose volatile Latin temperament the charms of their simple, humdrum existence in the Quartier had soon palled, hailed with enthusiasm the long looked-for announcement. Madame was too young, too beautiful to seclude herself in this unheard-of way! The beautiful gowns were hélas! out of the mode, now, but for what purpose did Madame possess such beautiful jewels,—to hide them in the banque, or to display them at the theatres and the grand cafés? Of what use were these artists, these brave young men who possessed not one sou to rub against another in their pockets! Madame was of the monde, for her to live this life of a nun was *encroyable*. It had made her *triste*, this idée excentrique of her mistress, but in spite of all she had remained, and now, behold! they would leave this wretched Quartier and return to the Paris of the boulevards!

On the evening of the day on which she had arrived at her decision, Mary saw him again,—the American on whom her thoughts had so inexplicably centred. She had gone with Philip Giron to the Café de le Chat Gris, on the Boul 'Miche', and was gazing about idly through the fragrant haze of tobacco smoke, when she discovered him seated at a table not far from her own, in company with two men whom she did not recognize. He recognized her at the same moment, and returned her salutation gravely. He did not glance at her again, but try as she might, she could not keep her eyes from straying back to his face. She nodded to her friends, she laughed at Philip's sallies, and ate her

moule mariniere and drank her vin ordinaire and listened to the wailing of the violins and 'cellos with an air of total absorption, but she was feverishly aware of his presence, his nearness to her, and she felt a strange, swift rush of excitement, almost intoxicating in its effect. Her covert glances at the sculptor showed her that he was thinner than when she had seen him last,— he looked tired and dispirited, as if he had been ill or dissipating, and he evidently took little interest in the gaiety of the light-hearted scene about him. Some friends — Cassenet, Larue and others,— crowding about Mary's table, claimed her attention, and when she could look again, the sculptor's table was vacant,— and he and his friends had vanished.

Then, all at once, Mary felt fatigued and weary. The air, heavy with smoke and perfume, redolent with the fumes of stale wine and the odor of steaming food, became suddenly stifling, unbearable, the babel of high-pitched voices talking, laughing, singing; the rattle and crash of crockery and glass, the wailing throb of the 'cellos all mingled in a confusion of sound, meaningless, deafening. Pleading headache as an excuse, she rose, and Philip Giron, bewildered by her abrupt change of mood, took her home.

All night she lay wide-eyed, battling with herself, but with the dawn she had made her decision. She crushed down fiercely the sneering incredulity which arose within her at the impersonality of her motive,— she told herself determinedly that this man had been forced so insistently upon her thoughts because she had done a mean and petty and spiteful thing in refusing to his genius the aid which she could give, because he himself displeased and antagonized her,— that Daingerfield himself was nothing to her, it was his work

which counted, his work which belonged to the world, and the generations to come. She must not consider him,—or herself. She must go to him and render the aid of her body, that his masterpiece might live.

Nina, bewildered and disconsolate, was set to the task of restoring to its wonted atmosphere the studio which she had commenced so gaily to dismantle the previous day, and without giving herself time to think, Mary dressed and walked swiftly to the little door in the rue Notre Dame des Champs.

At the girl's tentative knock, Richard Daingerfield himself threw wide the door, and for an instant they stood face to face, silently regarding each other.

Then he stepped aside, and made a gesture of welcome. Mary opened her lips to speak, but no words came.

"I knew that you would come," he said quietly, holding out his hand. "I am glad. It was a big thing that I asked of you, but it was not for myself,—it was for my work. I knew that you would understand, in time,—that you were too broad in spirit to let your own resentment and dislike of me stand forever in the way. I have waited a long while, but when I saw you last night in the Chat Gris, I knew that you would come to-day."

Mary gasped. She felt the helpless sensation of a moth caught in a spider's web. So her capitulation had been a foregone conclusion, a certainty, ordained from the first! And all at once she realized the truth of it all,—her night-long struggle with herself, her weeks of indecision and vacillation, her futile efforts to deceive herself. Somehow, somewhere back of all her specious reasoning, and argumentation, and excuses, she had known from the first that she must do

then, was what had been in her face, what Delvajo had seen and painted into the woman in grey. "Potentiality!" Capable of all things, comprehending much of the mystery of life, she had yet bestowed nothing of her soul, her inner being. True, she had given that which Lilith of old had withheld, but it had been selfishly, for her own ends. The woman had surrendered, that she might live to the full measure of her being. But the spirit had held aloof, unstained by the soil of her body, isolated, remote, in an aura of its own.

While she meditated, the sculptor had dismissed his workmen, and arranged the model-throne, and now he approached her again, the impatience of the genius fired by his inspiration in his eyes.

"If you will come now, Miss Tinney,—the dressing-room is here."

She obeyed him silently, moving as if in a dream. Once in the little mirrored chamber, she disrobed swiftly, mechanically, and unbound her red-gold hair. Then, without a glance at her reflection, she caught up a loose, silken robe which lay across a chair, and wrapping herself in it, passed out into the studio.

He was waiting by the model-throne, and she ascended it breathlessly. She marvelled at herself that she could move so steadily, with such calm precision. Her pulses were leaping, a suffocating band seemed pressed about her throat—the huge white shapes in the far recesses of the studio were so wavering and blurred, she felt that she must be swaying, reeling in the throes of this strange intoxication.

Then his voice sounded in her ears, seeming to come from out an immeasurable distance, and the chaos of her whirling senses cleared and steadied. She dropped the robe at her feet, and turning, stood revealed.

Her perfectly moulded body was straight as a young aspen, her rounded limbs themselves like those of a statue, and the warm, creamy tint of her flesh glowed in the mellow, subdued effulgence from the frosted panes of the sky-light above.

She felt her blood tingle bitingly beneath her skin, and then race madly through her veins beneath his scrutiny. A wave of sudden flame enveloped her from head to foot. Slowly she raised her eyes to meet his,—and found him studying her critically, absorbedly, with the rapt impersonal interest of the artist in his subject, and at his cold, appraising glance the color receded from her face, and her nerves steadied as if a dash of icy water had fallen upon her. He mounted the model-throne beside her, and she turned quietly and took the position he indicated to her, trying with infinite patience each modification of pose which he suggested, until at length even his exacting eye was satisfied, and he turned with an exultant sigh to his modeling board.

The day passed in a dream, a blank haze of unreality. Mary only awoke to a consciousness of herself and her surroundings, when in the soft June dusk, she found herself back in her own studio, weary and exhausted, aching in every limb from the long, cramping hours, faint from lack of food, spent and dazed by the varied emotions which had swept her. One of the students stopped to ask her to go with them to Les Deux Magots for dinner, but she declined, dully. She wanted only to be alone, to think, think! She slipped into a loose robe, and Nina, concerned for her mistress' fatigue, brought her some tea. Then she sat long at her window, watching the dusk fade into darkness and the early summer moon flood the little courtyard with

an eerie, silvery light. Gargantua, waving his plummy, orange tail, leaped upon her lap, kneading his velvet paws insinuatingly in her silken robe, but meeting with no response to his condescending overtures, he transferred his attention to the geraniums on the window-sill.

What could it mean, this revelation which had come to her to-day? What extraordinary influence had this man's personality exerted over her will, that he had drawn her steadily, irresistibly, to the point of capitulation? Why did he, above all other men whom she had known in these last crowded years, possess an attraction, an appeal to every sentient part of her? What were these strange, new, tremulous thoughts which filled her? It seemed to the girl that her whole nature had undergone an upheaval, a transformation — that the change had been subtly taking place through all these weeks, and she had deliberately, instinctively deceived herself with futile arguments and specious excuses, knowing all the time that it would prove stronger than she, in the end. What could it mean? She had thought her self-analysis to be exhaustive,— she fancied she knew the resources of her nature, and could confidently rely upon that knowledge, which had sustained and upheld her through all the vicissitudes of the past. Now she beheld herself an enigma, a creature of strange impulses and sensations which she could not name, the strength of will upon which she had so arrogantly depended swept away, the weaknesses which she had so cleverly concealed, and sought to stamp out transformed into an unknown danger which she felt powerless to combat. The lines of self-control, of repression — which she had drawn so tightly, so inexorably, smothering every passing inclination, every emotion

which threatened a deviation from the course she had laid out for herself and her ultimate future,— lay loose, in a hopeless tangle at her feet. This American, this Richard Daingerfield— why did this curious thrill course through her tired body like wine, at the thought of him? He was great, and rugged, and coarse, grossly self-centred, churlish, with no evidence of the finer-grained mentality than lay in the realm of his inspiration. She realized fully that he had no thought of her as a woman, only as a manikin, a necessary factor in the production of his masterpiece,— but she knew that she must go to him to-morrow, and for many to-morrows, that she must do anything, everything he asked of her, make of herself anything he desired, because he so willed.

And then the great, the final revelation burst upon her, and overwhelmed her in a swift onrush which left her stunned and quivering. She had looked at last deep into her own heart, and that which she had found there made her shrink back, cowering and afraid. She had not gone to him that morning because he willed it, because his strength of purpose had been greater than hers. She had gone because she could stay away no longer, because she *wanted* to go — wanted with every fibre of her being to stand in his presence. She had longed to be near him through all these weeks, when she had fought so blindly against this instinctive, unrecognized yearning. The nearness of him, the touch of his hand, the sound of his deep voice in her ears, the rare gentleness in his brown eyes, the swift radiance of his smile,— they had drawn her, gripped her, held her in strange fetters which she had no wish to shatter, if she could. To be near him—that was all, in the chaos of her emotions, that she could grasp, could rec-

ognize for what it was. The need of his presence, the strange, inexplicable joy of feeling his nearness to her.

At length the exhaustion of her body manifested itself, and she slept deeply, awaking in the soft grey dawn of a new day. She stumbled stiffly to bed, and slept for long hours, dreamlessly, in utter relaxation of body and mind, as if in her final surrender to the new forces at work within her, she had found peace.

Thereafter, a new existence commenced for her, and the weeks passed in a curious, waking ecstasy, which she tried no longer to combat, nor sought to analyze. She lived for the hours in the vast studio on the rue Notre Dame des Champs, the intervals between being mere voids of time to be bridged over as best she might. She withdrew utterly into herself, and her friends, bewildered at first by the subtle change in the girl, gradually divined her mood, and left her in peace. Only the English woman, Hilda Bickerstaff, shook her cropped, grey head ruefully, and sighed.

Outside the studio, Richard Daingerfield made no attempt to further their friendship. He extended no invitation to her to be his companion at any of the cafés or gathering places of the Quartier, and on the rare occasions when Mary consented to join a party of her old friends, she never encountered him. He was inconsiderate, utterly unthinking of her comfort, heedless of all else save the consummation of his ideal. Frequently, as on the first day, the luncheon hour passed unnoticed while he worked, and often the strain of posing for an interminable length of time in one cramped, immovable position, became an excruciating agony, which only by a supreme effort could she endure, but she was uncomplaining, even to herself, con-

tent, and happy with a happiness she did not seek to understand.

One evening, Monsieur Badin persuaded her to accompany him to a café she had never before visited—a quaint, very old establishment, in an out-of-the-way corner of the Quartier, frequented by the older, more sedate contingent. It was a curious little place, scrupulously neat, with freshly sanded floor, and tiny, marble-topped tables. The walls were covered with sketches and bits of scenes, many of them signed with names which had become immortal,—almost priceless now, they had undoubtedly been left in lieu of unsettled accounts of long standing, in the early days of struggle and unappreciated genius. Mary was vastly interested in it all,—in the quaint, old, low-ceilinged room, and the quiet, serious, grey-bearded groups at the little tables; even in Madame herself, elderly and rotund, who peered with sharp interest at each new comer, and greeted her old friends and patrons with a beaming face and ready flow of garrulous comment. She waited upon the tables herself and roundly berated the small, drab-looking maid who brought the steaming trays in from the kitchen adjoining. Their simple dinner was over, and Monsieur Badin was sipping his cognac in epicurean appreciation, when the tinkle of the little bell upon the door announced a belated arrival.

Mary glanced up, and her heart stood still for an instant, then beat tumultuously, and she averted her face to hide its sudden warmth. Richard Daingerfield had entered, with the assured step of a welcome guest, and he was not alone. A tall, dark French woman accompanied him. She was many years the senior of the

girl who watched her so breathlessly. Her figure was ugly, and sharply angular, her dark hair frowsy and carelessly coifed, her gown bizarre and daringly out of the mode, but the black eyes deep-set in her sallow, pointed face were large and glowing, and there was an air, a distinct charm about the woman which was elusive and indescribable, but poignant. She seemed a wiry tangle of nerves, which danced to the tune of her kaleidoscopic mood—the sharp shrug of her thin shoulders, the quick play of her long, white fingers covered with odd, dull, Oriental rings, in ever-moving gesticulation, the bird-like dart of her unkempt head from side to side, the lightning flash of her hard, bright eyes reminded one irresistibly of some tropical bird.

Richard Daingerfield glanced about him, and seeing Mary, he bowed with grave formality, then turned to Madame, who stood at his elbow, pouring out voluble greetings.

“Ah, zere is our good friend for whom you pose!” observed Monsieur Badin, waking from his reverie.

The strange woman glanced at him, and smiled swiftly, with a flash of startlingly white teeth between her parted, flagrantly reddened lips.

“Bon soir, Ma’moiselle Nan.”

“What a—curious looking person,” Mary could not help remarking. “I don’t remember ever seeing her before. Who is she?”

“Ma’moiselle Nana? She ees a wondairful cr-reature, and charmante, n’est pas? On dit zat she ees of Spain,—perhaps, who knows, zere ees also ze dr-drop of Algerian blood zere also. Eet ees so long zat she ’ave been of le Quartier, one forgets from w’ere she ’ave come.”

“What does she do?— Is she an artist, a—

sculptress?" Mary carefully kept her voice modulated to a level, idly-curious tone.

"Mais, non. Once, she was a model, and of ze most famous,—François Flameng and Carolus Duran, and many more 'ave painted her, but now she ees passée, she has not ze youth, vous savez. She and Monsieu' Daingerfield, zey are old friends."

Long that night Mary pondered, the face of the woman called Nana floating before her, the dark eyes gleaming in possessive triumph, upon the carmined lips a mocking smile.—What was she to Richard Daingerfield? What part did she play in his life? "Old friends," Monsieur Badin had said of them,—that might, in the easy camaraderie of the Quartier mean nothing, or everything! The girl writhed in her bed. This woman—this creature, with the painted lips and crow's-feet about her eyes, with untidy hair and horrible, bony figure,—what could any one, what could *he* see in her?

The night was wretched, interminable, the hours of posing the next day one long-drawn, nerve-racking agony. The sculptor made no reference to the encounter of the evening before, nor did Mary. He worked absorbedly, but the girl was distraught and overwrought. Her mood was anything but a plastic one, and her pose lifeless, inert. As if comprehending the futility of her discordant, unresponsive mental state, he told her at the noon hour that he should work no more that day, and she escaped thankfully.

Out on the blistering, sun-baked pavement of the rue Notre Dame des Champs, a sudden impulse led her to get away for a few hours from the noise, and glare, and hurrying crowds of the city—out in the cool greenness and solitude of the real country.

She made her way to the station, and took a way-train for a quiet, secluded little spot to which she had often gone with Hilda Bickerstaff and the rest the previous summer. Alighting at Montgeron, she drove to a little inn on the bank of the Seine which she remembered, and dismissing her carriage, walked far into the leafy recesses of the forest beside the placid, swift-running river.

She told herself that she would walk,—walk as far and as fast as she could, until she was so tired that she could not think. Then, perhaps, she would find peace. She was amazed at herself, and furiously angry, as well. She sought vehemently to summon her pride, her vaunted immunity and independence to her aid, she lashed herself with scorn,—but beneath it all remained the dull ache, the poignant, unaccustomed misery.

Suppose this woman — this Nana — was Richard Daingerfield's mistress? Suppose he had a dozen mistresses, a hundred loves, what was it to her! She had no part in his life,—she was merely an acquaintance whom he had asked to pose for him, in whom he had no personal interest. Why, then, should a glimpse of him dining with another woman cause her such pain, such hours of wretchedness.— Could it be that she was *jealous*? She fought back the thought savagely. She cared for no man, she was mistress of her own heart, her own destiny!

And then the mental picture came to her of this Nana creature in his arms, her dusky hair falling about him, her gleaming eyes half-closed, her thin, tenacious arms clinging to him, her carmined lips upturned. . . . She flung herself face downward in the soft moss in a paroxysm of tears.

"Oh, God!" she sobbed, like a little child. "Make

me not to love him! He has no thought of me — I don't exist in his eyes! I must go on — I must live my life as I've begun, and love has no place in it! Don't let this suffering come to me! — I've always been fair, I've never done any harm in the world, never hurt anybody! I only tried to make the most of my life, in the only way I could. I never thought that I could care, I never dreamed! Don't make me suffer so, dear Lord! — Don't let me love him!"

CHAPTER XVII

MARY returned to Paris late in the evening, and schooled herself for the ordeal confronting her, of continuing to pose until the model of Lilith was finished, to endure the long, dangerously sweet hours in the presence of Richard Daingerfield. The model was far advanced, it would be but a short time now before the end, and she alternately longed for and dreaded the hour of its completion. She would not be a coward, and desert him at the time of his greatest need of her, she would not run away, in abject fear of her own weakness, although she knew that every day added to the burden which she would have to tear from her heart when it was all over. She promised herself that when the moment of her release came, she would fling herself out into life again, and crowd so much into each hour, that there would be no room for memory, for emotion to assert itself, and get the upper hand. She would prove to herself the strength of her own will.

Richard Daingerfield found her more than usually quiet and self-contained during the days which followed, but she was conscientiously faithful to her self-imposed task, and the work progressed steadily. Save for her daily visits to the studio on the rue Notre Dame des Champs, she kept herself much at home, and declined with a sort of horror Monsieur Badin's invitation to dine again at the little café where she had encountered the woman called Nana.

One evening the English woman, Hilda Bickerstaff,

ran in to show her a batch of illustrations she had just finished for a series of Algerian travel articles, and adroitly brought the ensuing conversation around at length to the personality of artists in general, and Richard Daingerfield in particular.

"He's a curious specimen, my dear," she remarked, apropos of nothing, but watching Mary's guarded face out of the corner of her eye. "None of us pretend to understand him. Did you ever succeed in drawing him out?"

"I never tried," replied the girl, quietly. "He's very much absorbed in his work, you know, and we seldom discuss — personalities, anyway. I really know very little about him. He's very — interesting, I think."

"Interesting? Yes, he rather compels interest. One always fancies there must be a story worth hearing behind that taciturnity of his, but no one, to my knowledge, has ever heard it. His sculpture is wonderful — it would be really great, I think, the work of his generation, perhaps of this century, if it were not for the man's own evil genius."

"I — I don't quite understand what you mean, Hilda. He seems to put his heart and soul into his efforts —"

"If he possesses any heart and soul. When you see more of his work, his finished work, you will understand. He will create something majestic in proportion, pure in line, exquisite in conception — and then some sardonic, malign humor stronger than himself, forces him, it would seem, to add some devilish, malicious touch which renders it abortive, hideous in its derisive irony, a travesty of his inspiration. His 'Birth of Lilies' is an illustration. — You've seen it?"

"No."

"It's in the Luxembourg. You know the old legend of the lilies, that they sprang from the tears Eve shed when she and her mate were cast out of the Garden of Eden? My dear, the group is a masterpiece, pure, and true, and faultless in detail — until you look well at the face of Eve. Adam is looking back over his shoulder for a last yearning glimpse of the Paradise he has lost, between the closing gates, and his hunted, wildly despairing expression is masterfully portrayed, but the woman's face as she turns to him, not for comfort but in gloating mockery, is full of evil triumph, through her hypocritical tears, and malicious, fiendish glee. The pure, stately lilies springing up at her feet seem to be defamed. Nobody understood it, so the critics raved about it, and it made his reputation. The French love anything outré, anything daring, anything which defies the conventional order of things, even if they do not quite comprehend it, and they took him to their hearts as the latest exponent of modern cynicism. He simply played upon his knowledge of their love for the bizarre, the outrageous, and thoroughly enjoyed the bewildered floundering about of the critics. We, who knew him and understood, abused him roundly for it, and tried to shame him, but he was merely amused. He is quite at odds with the world — it is as if some great trouble had come to him, years ago, which instead of mellowing and broadening him, and making him great, has only succeeded in blighting his genius, hardening and stultifying him, until he is a mere husk of a man, with a dead soul and only bitterness and rancor in his heart. And yet he is great — really great, in spite of it. What a man he might have been — what a power!"

"He will be, I think," stammered Mary.

The older woman shrugged.

"He has been here for ten years or more — he struggled desperately for recognition in the States, I believe, but it was denied him. Now he sells his work there at fabulous prices, and, I fancy, laughs in his sleeve."

"But surely he has done some sincere things — some studies which ring true, which are noble, sublime!" Mary, herself forgotten, rushed warmly to his defence. "His 'Viking' — have you seen it? His portrait bust of Maximilian, his 'Lucrece,' his 'King Lear'! There is no belittling, mocking touch in them. They are transcendental, — profound in their dignity, and consummate in their sincerity and truth."

"Yes. I've seen them. They are marvellous, of course. I admit that he is really great, my dear — a genius of the first water. It is only in certain moods that this grotesque cynicism manifests itself, and seems to master him. It is as if he cannot resist the creative impulse to give life to his sublime inspiration, and then is ashamed of baring his ideal to the gaze of a public which in the past has shown itself pitiless, and so seeks to mask its beauty and purity of thought beneath a veil of profane ridicule. Go and see his 'Lilies,' and you will perhaps understand."

Mary went the next day. She had unaccountably overlooked it on her previous visits to the Musée de Luxembourg, and now she stood long before it. It was as Hilda Bickerstaff had said, a masterpiece indeed — the grim sardonic humor of it hideously repellent, yet gripping, the diabolic touch added with supreme cleverness, the whole group executed with profound mastery. Studying it, Mary seemed for the first time to be able dimly to comprehend the man's discordant

temperament, the warring impulses which assailed his moods and colored but could not nullify his genius. She was profoundly stirred, and her heart went out in sudden pity for him, which was akin to the maternal. What could this evil spirit be which hounded him, and what appalling sorrow or injustice had given it birth! It could scarcely be the mere early lack of appreciation of which the Englishwoman had spoken, which had so warped him. His nature was too big, too sweeping in its strength, to be marred by anything petty, anything which did not strike to the very root of his being.

She moved slowly away, the influence of his dominant personality descending upon her as never before, the force of her love for him sweeping her as a surging torrent. Fearful of her own thoughts, striving desperately to drive the dull throbbing ache of her longing from her heart, she emerged from the Musée, and hailing a taxi-mètre, she told the chauffeur on a sudden impulse, to take her to Armenonville.

She was seldom in this part of Paris which she had formerly known so well, save when she went monthly to her banker's to send to the wretched family at home in the New England mill-town the anonymous money order which had never failed to reach them since she had left America.

It was months since she had been in a restaurant of the monde, more than a year since she had been a part of the merry, frivolous whirl of things, and she turned to it again, blindly, to escape from the dangerous trend of her emotions.

She seated herself at a little table beneath the gaily-striped awning on the lawn, and ordered a *peche parfait*, then idly watched the stream of motor-cars and victorias rolling up to the entrance and depositing their

burden of brilliantly attired femininity and their more soberly apparelled escorts. Faint, sensuous strains of harmony came from behind a clump of palms on the broad veranda and the low murmur of voices and tinkle of light laughter fell upon her ear. Mary looked at those about her,—how easily one slipped into the life here, and how soon one was forgotten when one dropped out of it, for a time. There was not one of those at the tables near whom she had known,—scarcely a familiar face. Paula's evanescent group had no doubt scattered, as had the Baron's and Reba's before her.

Yet a man was coming toward her, threading his way with care between the crowded tables, who reminded her vaguely of some one she had known. She wondered idly who he might be, still too much under the spell of her emotion to rouse herself to an effort of definitely placing him in her mind, until he paused before her.

"Miss Tinney! This is a ripping surprise! Fancy meeting you again, and here! I say, where've you been hiding all this while?"

With a start, she came to herself, and memory carried her back swiftly over the intervening years to her little establishment with the Baron on the Avenue Wagram. The man before her was an acquaintance of his and one of the few Englishmen whom she had met at that time whom she had found at all congenial. She gave her hand to Lord Eshelbury with a little smile of greeting, and motioned to a chair opposite.

"I've just been to the Musee de Luxembourg, to see some recent work of a sculptor I know, and I stopped here for a sweet, and to see what the Paris I used to know is doing. I was thinking, just before you appeared, how quickly the old groups change in charac-

ter, like shifting sands, and how easily one is forgotten when one drops out of things."

"Not always," Lord Eshelbury returned, meaningly. He was a man of forty-five, tall and lean, with thin dark hair and a smooth-shaven, ascetic face. The bored, weary expression which she remembered, and which had seemed habitual, had given place to a look of quickened interest. "So you've been out of the running for a bit, eh? Been back to the States?"

"No. I've been living very quietly here in Paris, since — for over a year, studying, and improving my mind," she replied, laughingly. "And you?"

"Oh, I went out to India for a time, and shooting in Austria and fishing in Scotland, and loafing at the Towers. I haven't seen the Baron for quite a century. How is he?"

"He returned to Russia eighteen months ago," Mary replied simply, and was immediately aware that Lord Eshelbury's manner underwent a subtle change to a more personal level.

"Indeed? I had not heard.— 'And so you've been hiding away like a little mouse, and gaining wisdom. Don't you find it a bit dull, now and then?'"

Mary smiled, again.

"Indeed no. I'm immensely interested. I have the dearest little bandbox of a studio in the Impasse du Maine, over in the old Latin Quartier, across the Seine, and Nina looks after me — you remember Nina? Ah, no, of course not. I had forgotten, she came to me when the Baron and I went to Biarritz." She paused, and then added, deliberately, in a soft voice, "You are here for some little time, Lord Eshelbury?"

He shot a quick look at her from his narrowed eyes.

"That depends," he replied, slowly. "I ran over

from London yesterday, for a day or so, but if you'll let me trot you about a bit, I'll stay on. What do you say? It will do you a lot of good, really,—‘all work and no play,’ you know!”

“I — I should like it, so much,” Mary said, quickly, not daring to give herself time to think. “Come over and dine with me this evening. You will be amused at my tiny establishment, and Nina shall give us a dinner à l’Espagnole. You will come?”

He accepted with alacrity, and a little later, as Mary rolled homeward in her taxi-mètre, she was filled with honest bewilderment at her sudden impulse. Why on earth had she asked this Englishman to dine with her? He would be horribly out of place in her studio, and hideously uncomfortable in its unaccustomed atmosphere. And why had she so patently annexed him, why had she grasped so hurriedly at his offer to be her pilot back through the shoals she knew, and had fled from in loathing? Return to them she must, of course, when the need for her in the studio on the rue Notre Dame des Champs had passed, and her hours there were already numbered. She could not fail to read his meaning, his carefully implied suggestion. “Why not?” she asked herself, drearily. It might as well be he, as another! It would mean London, of course, and London was comparatively unknown ground to her. It would be a new atmosphere, an absolute change of environment,—perhaps there she might be content in time, she might be able to forget.— Quite suddenly, she leaned back in a corner, and burst into silent tears. What a hideous, hideous thing life was!

The dinner was a huge success. Lord Eshelbury was immensely interested in the little studio, and displayed a knowledge and love of books which surprised

Mary. Nina's dinner, too, was a culinary work of art, and her black eyes danced as she served them. She had lost all patience, had Nina, with Madame's whim in staying on in this hole of a Quartier, and now, behold, an admirer had come, a possible lover, and — *quien sabe?* — it might be that he would persuade Madame to return to the world in which she belonged.

At Lord Eshelbury's insistence, Mary went back with him across the Seine at midnight, to the heated, perfumed air of Maxim's, and returned at dawn, inexpressibly weary and depressed, but with her sudden impulse of the afternoon crystallized into a definite resolve. The solution of the emotional tangle into which she had gotten herself was before her, the means at hand to enable her to escape from the bitter-sweet proximity of the man who had no thought of her, from the indecision and futile yearnings which vexed her soul. If Lord Eshelbury, — and his manner, as the night had progressed, left no shade of doubt as to his ultimate intention, — should ask her to become his companion, she would go to him.

She dragged herself to the studio that day, forcing herself to meet Richard Daingerfield's eyes, to relax her slim body passively upon the model-throne, to veil her traitorous face in the mask of soulless allurements, which embodied his inspiration. The sculptor noticed nothing of her abstraction, of the growing restraint she had placed upon herself. He was absorbed in the work before him, his face set in scowling lines of puzzled discontent.

"What is it?" she asked at last, timidly, noting his rising impatience and displeasure. "The pose is right, isn't it?"

"Oh, the pose is all right, it isn't that, but some-

thing's wrong, I can't tell what. There's a change, somewhere,—it isn't Lilith, it isn't my conception! God, am I to fail, now!"

"I'm sorry!" she faltered. "Perhaps it's just your mood, you know, perhaps you've worked too steadily at it lately, looked at it so long that it's wearied your eyes, and everything seems wrong."

"No, no!" he cried irritably. "You talk like a child! Don't I know, can't I tell when an inspiration eludes me, gets beyond my grasp, when the work of my hands grows against my will into something else, takes on a note, a meaning foreign to my conception? Something is radically wrong, I tell you!"

He stepped back from the modelling-stand, and looked from it to her in helpless exasperation.

"Then maybe it is I—the pose is the correct one, but perhaps my expression —"

"I don't know. I can't tell, but I shall work no more to-day. I must think this out. I cannot fail now, I cannot! I have dreamed this for so long, worked for it, lived in it—" he broke off sharply, and turned away as if to hide his emotion.

She caught up the enveloping robe, and started for the dressing room, but at the door he halted her for a moment.

"Don't come to-morrow. I—I'll let you know.—It may be several days. I must study the model and find out what is wrong."

Mary left the studio, and started homeward with black fear in her heart. She, who desired more than anything else in life to serve him, who would have followed him to the ends of the earth if he but carelessly beckoned, who would without a murmur have laid aside her lifelong ambition and ruling determination at one

word, one caress from him,—had she failed him now? Could it be that his cherished inspiration, his Lilith, was doomed because she herself had changed, because she could no longer summon at will the cold, passionless immobility of the dream-woman? She had been an embodiment of Lilith, in very truth, when he had met her,—sure of herself, aware of her fascination, her physical allurements, but rendered impregnable in her stronghold of self by her unresponsive heart, her calloused sensibility. And now—was her heart's awakening betrayed in her face, was she no longer sufficient mistress of herself to mask her emotions, to play the part she was called upon to perform, to present to him the ideal which he had formed, which had made him single her out from all women, to help him in the creation of his masterpiece? Without her, she knew, he was helpless, and the power to aid him seemed to have slipped from her grasp. Could it be that her very love for him had been turned into a weapon against her—against them both?—that her consuming desire to be of service to him had resolved itself into a devastating menace which defeated its own purpose, its end and aim in being?

The time slipped by, and no word came to her from him. At first, she remained at home, obstinately turning a deaf ear to Lord Eshelbury's importunities, in fear lest the message should come, and she be not there to obey it. At length, the waiting ravaged her nerves, the suspense became unbearable, and in desperation she placed herself in the Englishman's hands, and rushed madly about Paris, seeking in a fever of unrest, to put all thought from her.

Lord Eshelbury was enslaved—he had thought her charming, in the old days, refreshingly youthful and

naïve and unspoiled. Now he found her a woman who stimulated his jaded senses, who satisfied eye and brain alike, and who fitted with surpassing ease into every mood and whim, never jarring upon his fastidious sensibility, yet exhilarating him like wine and awakening sensations to which he had long been a stranger.

Her ménage with the Baron had, of course, left him no illusions as to her character, although he was satisfied that her present mode of life was without romance. He was a man who brooked no surmountable obstacles where his desires were concerned, and only her attitude, a subtle suggestion of guardedness in her manner toward him, had held him back from an abrupt presentation of his proposition.

Mary sensed the coming moment, she was too sensitive to impressions, too well versed in the ways of the world in which she had moved, to be oblivious to the approach of the hour when she must capitulate. Commonsense, the stern, pitiless philosophy in which she had schooled herself, the futility of indecision, the exigencies of her life all prompted her to cast the die, but instinctively she shrank from it, and a voice within her cried out "Not yet! Not yet!"

One evening, more than a week after her last visit to the studio on the rue Notre Dame des Champs, they were sitting together at a little table in the raised alcove at Maxim's, idly watching the dancers below, when Lord Eshelbury spoke of his pending departure for London. Mary gathered her forces, and braced herself for what she knew was at hand. She had not thought to stave it off much longer, but she had hoped it might not come so soon,—not, at least, until she had heard again from Richard Daingerfield.

"It's been simply ripping, running into you over

here!" Lord Eshelbury was saying. "I never forgot you, you know — couldn't seem to get you out of my mind, and I looked about for you, but I'd quite given up hope of seeing you again, and fancied you'd returned to the States. We've had a bully old holiday, haven't we? — I hate going back to London, and leaving you here —" he leaned suddenly over the table and spoke very deliberately. "I say, Mary, why don't you chuck it all, and come over with me? It's no good your burying yourself here like this, and I need you, more than I can tell you."

"Oh, I — I hardly know what to say — I've been very happy here!" she faltered, her face very white. "I couldn't — you must give me time to think it over —"

"All the time you like. This isn't any sort of life for you, you know, grubbing along in that studio of yours. It must be deadly dull, and I'll wager you're heartily sick of it by now, only you won't admit it! You're bound to go back, in time — I mean to say, go about in the world again. You surely didn't intend to give it all up, and live that colorless sort of existence, did you?"

Mary shook her head, her distressed eyes fixed blindly upon the whirl of figures below.

"No, I — I meant to go back sometime, I think — but not yet!"

"Come back to London with me!" he urged. "I'll get you a jolly little place, anywhere you say, and we'll have no end of a time! We'd get along famously, I'm sure. — I'm not a bad sort, Mary, as you'll find, and I'll do the right thing by you. What do you say?"

"Oh, don't — don't ask me now! Give me a little time —"

"You don't dislike me?" he asked, quietly.

"Ah, no! Indeed, I don't. You know I like you, or I should not have gone about with you, I should not have been so glad when you came to me at Armenonville, to renew our friendship. To-morrow evening we dine at the Café Madrid, do we not? — Let me decide, let me tell you then!"

"As my lady pleases. I — I don't think I've ever wanted a woman in my life as I want you, Mary. I can't pretend any grand passion — I've lived a lot and ridden hard, — but I need a woman like you, and I'll make you happy."

"Oh, I'm sure — I'm sure you would."

As if it was a matter already adjusted between them, they turned then to a light, impersonal discussion, and at a comparatively early hour, Mary found herself at home. Her decision was already made, the struggle was over, the irrevocable step must be taken, and she felt no longer any suffering, only an utter weariness of mind and body and soul. She undressed slowly, and laid herself upon her bed, a merciful numbness encompassing her, and so sank at length to slumber.

Early the next morning, the Englishwoman, Hilda Bickerstaff, with determinedly squared shoulders, and a set look of resolve upon her face, presented herself at Richard Daingerfield's door.

He welcomed her cordially, as if glad of a respite from his own disturbed thoughts, and showed her about the studio, listening with keen pleasure to her few but pointed comments.

At length she stood before the figure on his model-

ling-board, and a little cry of delighted appreciation escaped her.

"Ah, how exquisite! It's our little American friend, my neighbor in the Impasse du Maine, of course! I knew she was posing for you, but not the subject. What is it?— An 'Awakening of Eve,' perhaps. It is charming!"

"Charming!" he thundered, his face ablaze with anger, and the light of a sudden, unwelcome revelation. "'Awakening of Eve!'— My God, you've hit it! You've struck the keynote! That's why it's a failure, — why it's defied me, and twisted itself into the puerile thing it is, under my hands! And I never thought — I couldn't see!"

"Dickie Daingerfield, whatever are you exploding about? It's adorable—quite the most exquisite bit you've done!"

"It was to have been my Lilith,—my masterpiece! And you call it an 'exquisite bit'!" he groaned. Then he seized her arm and dragged her to an angle from which the light shone with revealing clearness upon the figure. "Look at it! Look at that face, sentient with emotion, with the knowledge of love!— Is that the face of Lilith, soulless, passionless, a creature who doesn't know the meaning of animal attraction? Damn that woman,— I beg your pardon, Hilda, I scarcely know what I am saying, I'm almost beside myself!"

"But what has she done? — I don't understand!" Hilda Bickerstaff regarded the figure with uncomprehending eyes.

"Done? She's elected to fall in love with somebody, that's what she's done! It's in her face, and I, like an idiot, couldn't see it. Why did the woman have to choose this time of all others, to entangle herself

in an affair, I should like to know, and ruin my Lilith. Hilda, I've been dreaming of it for years, but I never found a model who approached my conception, until I ran across her in Delvajo's studio, when he was painting her. She was perfect, then,—the embodiment of Lilith! Cold, aloof, aware of her own power of attraction, but incapable of a conception of passion. And now it is gone forever, ruined! My Lilith will never be born! Why could she not have waited,—what devil of perversity inspired her to fall in love just now? Why should her wretched little affairs have intruded, and slain my masterpiece!"

"Dick, are you as blind as a bat? Do you mean to say you didn't know,—haven't guessed—"

"I was blind, but you've opened my eyes, Hilda. I couldn't think before what was wrong, and I was in despair. Now, I know! 'Charming,' you called it,—an 'exquisite bit'! Faugh!—Lilith is dead, stillborn, and in her place I shall finish this abominable thing, and call it—what did you suggest? Ah, yes! 'The Awakening of Eve'! And the imbeciles of critics will rave about it, and the Musee will put it in a place of honor! And my Lilith is doomed because a fool of a woman takes it upon herself to fall in love!"

Hilda Bickerstaff looked at him for a moment of withering silence, and when she spoke it was as the harsh, grating exhaust of her pent-up feeling.

"Richard Daingerfield, you utter, utter idiot! You—unmitigated—pig!"

She left him abruptly, as if fearful of her guard over her tongue, if she remained longer in his presence, and after a minute of vague wonder at her precipitate departure, the bitter disappointment and sor-

row of the revelation which had come to him engulfed him, and he thought of her no more.

So it was that an hour later, Mary found him confronting her in her studio, his tones frigid but his eyes blazing with what was very like wrathful contempt.

"I have come," he said, his voice trembling with the restraint he had placed upon himself, "to thank you for posing for me, Miss Tinney. There is no further need for you to come. The model is completed."

She took a step toward him.

"Lilith is finished?" she faltered.

"Not Lilith,—the thing for which you posed is not, can never be Lilith. That dream of mine is over. I shall call the figure—something else! I thought you were the embodiment of my conception—I was mistaken. That is all."

"Then I—have failed you." Her voice was scarcely above a whisper, her eyes filled with agony.

"Not at all. I was mistaken," he reiterated, coldly. "That picture of Delvajo's probably influenced me, and I fancied something in your expression which—was not there. I came to thank you for acceding to my request, for your patience in posing for me, and to say *au revoir*."

"You are—you are going away?" She was not conscious that she had spoken, would not have recognized as hers the voice which sounded in her ears.

"Yes, I'm leaving Paris for a time." He strode to her quickly, and held out his hand. He was anxious to get away, anywhere out of her sight, afraid to trust himself to remain courteous to her much longer. She had ruined his masterpiece with her own stupid, damned sentimentality over some fellow! Fool!

Little, arrogant fool! "Thank you, again, and — good-bye!"

She was alone. The door, closing after his departing figure, blotted out the sunlight, and she stood where he had left her, colorless, swaying, the world crashing down about her ears.

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When Lord Eshelbury came for her that evening, she made no movement to greet him, but stood looking at him in silence.

He went to her, and placing his hands upon her shoulders, he gently turned her until the light showed full upon her face.

"Well?" he asked, quietly.

She smiled, a pitifully weary little smile, and held out her hands to him.

"You were right, Gerald," she said, slowly. "This isn't the sort of life for me — I don't belong here. If you really want me — I'll come with you!"

CHAPTER XVIII

MARY TIMNEY stood before the mirror, in her tiny satin-hung boudoir, while Nina put the finishing touches to her gown. It was after eleven, and Gerald would soon be returning with his friends, for supper. These eternal supper parties — how she had grown to loathe them! The inane chatter, the wit which was pointless when it was not coarse, the leering, obvious flattery, the noise, the wine — how odious it all was! She turned away from the mirror with a little shudder, and silenced Nina's encomiums with a nervous gesture. How she would like to slip away quietly alone somewhere, if only for a time, — to be herself, to drop the rôle which had become unspeakably irksome to her. She would speak to Gerald about it after their guests had gone. His attentions had been conspicuously lessening of late, and she had heard rumors concerning the latest blonde-haired Gaiety beauty which filled her with amused disdain. Perhaps he would put no obstacles in her path — would welcome her absence. With a shrug, she passed down the stairs to the drawing-room.

Gerald came in a little later, with a group of men, — his chosen companions, whom she had met since coming to London with him, and whom she viewed with varying degrees of indifference and actual dislike. There was a newcomer among them on this occasion, however, and Gerald brought him to her. She turned

from a perfunctory greeting and found herself, without warning, looking into eyes she remembered.

"Mary, allow me to present Captain Cope-Herrington. Miss Tinney."

She held out her hand with a wordless smile. The face of the man towering above her, turned a dull, mottled red, and he seized her hand and shook it violently, stammering out his pleasure in a tone which quite belied his words. When Mary could collect herself, she took pity upon his embarrassment, and quelled it beneath Gerald's sharp eyes with a few, simple words of conventional welcome. Then she turned to the others, and Gerald bore his guest off for a whiskey and soda.

How she got through the supper hour, Mary could not have told. She forced herself to partake of the food placed before her, she drained her glass of champagne, she laughed and chatted and exchanged banter for banter, and all the while her thoughts were on the man across the table, whose eyes she would not meet.

How Cecil had changed in the few years which had passed since the memorable night when he had left her in Paris! The old, clean look of youth was gone—he was coarsened and fleshy, his eyes dull, his face puffy and the clear pink skin had deepened to a blotchy red. He drank more champagne than was good for him, and his voice, when he found it, was strident and unnecessarily loud.

Mary sickened at his presence. She wished passionately that Gerald had not brought him, that he had not again crossed her path to spoil her memory of him as he had been when his love for her had for a little while changed her world into an enchanted place.

She escaped as soon as she could to the drawing-room, and there Cecil followed her, seating himself

beside her with a wistful doggedness which reminded her faintly of the boy she had known. His momentary exhilaration had passed from him, and she noted with a little pang the faint tracery of weary lines about the eyes he turned to her.

"I—I hope you'll forgive me for intruding," he said, hesitatingly. "I hadn't a deuce of an idea, when Eshelbury brought me along from the play, who I was to meet. You will believe that, won't you?"

"Of course. But I am glad you came—I am glad to have seen you again," she fibbed, bravely. "I have thought often of you—I heard of your marriage. I was glad—I hope you are very, very happy."

"Oh—as to that," he dropped his eyes, "I suppose I am, in a way. I—I've got a ripping little kiddie, looks just like the mater. He's a plucky little devil, isn't afraid of anything—" his voice trailed off into silence, and there was a hideous pause.

"Have you been back to Paris, lately?" Mary asked the question hurriedly, scarcely conscious of what she was saying, desiring only to bridge the horrible abyss of embarrassment yawning between them.

"No—never. And you?"

"Not since I came to London, three years ago. Before that, I lived very quietly for a year, studying."

"You—stayed on, then?"

"In the rue Perouse? No—I went to live in the old Quartier Latin, among the artists, you know. It was very interesting, and—I learned a great deal."

"You like London?" The tone was an absent one, the question perfunctory, and she answered it in kind.

"Oh, very much. I didn't like it at first—it seemed grey and depressingly dismal and forlorn after sunny France, but when I grew to know it, and to

find my way about I loved it, of course, as every one must."

"Mary," he spoke her name unconsciously, and turned again toward her, with the air of one taking a plunge into cold water. It was quite evident that he had not heard one word of her reply. "I—I want to tell you that I appreciate what you did for me, in giving me my congé.— I mean to say, I appreciate your wisdom in declining to—to be my wife! You quite broke my heart at the time, I don't mind telling you,—I was a hot-headed youngster in those days, —and you did lead me on, you know! Upon my soul, I thought you cared for me!"

"I honestly thought that we could be very happy together,—but after you'd gone, and I had time to think, I saw how impossible it would be. I—I'm glad that you realize now what an unsuitable thing it would have been."

"Oh, yes—you were cleverer than I, Mary. You saw things more clearly.— But jolly few girls would have done it, you know," he added, with unconscious conceit. "They'd have chanced it,—my career, and all that,—it was damn good of you to refuse me!"

Mary smiled, wearily.

"It wouldn't have been a wise thing for either of us," she remarked. "Your uncle, Sir Anthony, told me that you would thank me some day for my decision."

"Uncle Tony? My word, where did you meet him? I didn't know you knew him!"

Mary sighed with genuine relief. If he did not know of his uncle's visit to her, he, of course, had heard nothing of the five thousand pounds.

"He called on me in Paris, to discuss our—our

engagement, but I had mailed my letter to you, telling you that—that I had changed my mind, just a few hours before his arrival.”

“Interfering old rascal!” ejaculated Cecil. “Still, his coming could have made no difference, if you’d really meant to marry me, could it?”

“No,” she assented, dully. “It could have made no difference.”

He rose awkwardly, and held out his hand.

“I must be going on. I don’t get up to London very much, except in the season—country squire, and all that sort of thing, you know,—but I hope we shall meet again, sometime.”

Mary gave him her hand, mechanically.

“Of course,” she murmured. “London is so small.— I—I’m glad you don’t harbor any resentment against me, Cecil. I only did what I did, for the best.”

“I know,” he answered, gently. “Life’s a queer thing, isn’t it? I’m glad it all happened, though, Mary. I’ll never forget that springtime in Paris.”

“Nor I. It was the sweetest, truest episode of all my life, and I shall cherish it always in my thoughts. And knowing that you are happy and content now, removes the last trace of an aftermath of bitterness in the memory of it, Cecil. Good-night.”

The last of their guests had taken himself off, and Gerald stood in the door of Mary’s boudoir, regarding her in contemplative fashion, as she stood before the mirror, braiding the thick rope of red-gold hair. She had slipped on a loose robe of daring oriental design and the effect of the blaze of coloring in the subdued, delicately-tinted room was barbaric, like a gorgeously-hued moth.

"My word, but you're a stunner—you are, you know, really!" his voice held a note of grudging admiration, and he lounged forward, and dropped into a chaise-longue near her.

Mary smiled a little doubtfully—the opening did not augur well for the result of the coming interview. If Gerald were to have one of his intermittent fits of tenderness, it would be awkward to ask for the leave of absence.

"Silly boy!— How was the play?"

"Oh, the usual thing—society comedy. Wonder what rotter invented that anomalous description! There never is any comedy in society—only pure farce."

"And sometimes—tragedy." Mary's thoughts had strayed back to the unexpected encounter of the evening, and the memories it had reawakened. Then with a shrug, she threw off the mood which was fast encompassing her. "Heavens! how epigrammatic we're becoming!"

"I say, Mary," he leaned forward, suddenly. "Where did you meet Cope-Herrington before?"

She turned slowly to him.

"I don't understand, Gerald—"

"You needn't hedge, old girl, it's no good. You've known him before, right enough. I saw it in both your faces to-night. When was it?"

"In Paris, several years ago. I'm not trying to hedge, as you call it—there's nothing I should conceal from you."

"Old affair, eh? I thought as much! Hang it all, Mary, you might have told me!"

She flushed, hotly.

"It was not at all the—the sort of an affair you

imagine, Gerald. And I did not know that you even knew Captain Cope-Herrington—you never mentioned his name to me.”

“Didn’t occur to me that it was necessary.— Hell of a note, I must say, if I’ve got to bring a list of my acquaintances to you, to see if there’s an old lover or two of yours among them!”

“Gerald! You are—insulting! I tell you that you are mistaken—my acquaintance with Captain—”

“Acquaintance! Look here, my dear woman, I’m no fool! I know,—a man and a woman don’t look at each other as you two did to-night, if there hadn’t been something to remember.”

“You are wrong!” she insisted. Her temper had risen at the easy insolence of his tone, and she added, in a quick rush of words: “But even if your surmise had been correct—if such an episode had taken place as you imagine, it would be no affair of yours! My life before I met you was mine, to do with as I would, and it will be, again! You knew me for what I was when you brought me on from Paris, and I made no useless protestations to you—there was no need. If Captain Cope-Herrington had been my lover—the sort of lover you mean—his being here to-night was entirely your doing, and you would have yourself to thank for it, no one else! You gave me no warning, no intimation.”

“I dare say,—but, damn it, it wasn’t exactly pleasant. You know, it’s no good your spoofing me, old girl! I know what you’ve been to him—just what you’ve been to me, and a dozen others!”

“That is a lie!” said Mary, very deliberately. Her face was colorless now, and her topaz eyes were shot with yellow gleams. She drew a step nearer to him.

"If you must know, Captain Cope-Herrington once did me the honor of asking me to marry him."

Gerald threw back his head and laughed derisively.

"Proposed to you, eh? Oh, I say, that is a bit thick, upon my soul!— Why didn't you marry him, if he asked you?"

"Because I—I knew it wouldn't do, and we would neither of us be happy. It would have ruined his career—"

"Gad, that's a likely story! As if a woman like you wouldn't jump at the chance to marry a chap like Cope-Herrington! Go on, for heaven's sake, this is better than the play!"

She looked long at him, and beneath the clear, steady glow of utter contempt in her eyes the man inwardly writhed.

"If what little mind you've got wasn't warped and twisted into the hopeless, despicable thing it is, you'd know that even such a woman as I am is capable at times of looking beyond her own, immediate, material advantage!"

"Not you, my dear—you're in the game for all you can get out of it.— Not that I blame you, you play fair. But you're all alike, you women who give yourselves to us—nothing counts, nothing matters but the price!"

"And do you think that the price you are paying gives you the right to insult me, in this way?"

He had risen, and started to pace up and down the floor, and now he wheeled upon her, in the grip of a new, revealing thought.

"I say, how much did they pay you?— What was the price of Cope-Herrington's freedom?"

Mary started, and in spite of herself a deep flush

overspread her face, and mounted to her throbbing temples. She made no reply.

"Ha! I'm commencing to believe you, now. I was a fool not to have thought of it before. That was the game, of course, and they played into your hands, and bought you off! What price Cope-Herrington?"

"Gerald," said Mary, slowly. "I'm through—finished. I shall not submit to your insults for another instant! I repeat, that my affairs are my own, and I am not interested in what passes in your filthy little mind concerning me. I released Captain Cope-Herrington from our engagement, of my own free will, without coercion or the thought of any bribe being offered me. I did it because it was the best thing, the only thing, to do. I had thought, at first, that we could be happy, but another woman of my world who had tried it with a boy like Captain Cope-Herrington, showed me my mistake. I don't know why I'm offering this explanation to you, your insulting behavior doesn't entitle you to it, and it's a matter of supreme indifference to me whether you believe it, or not. I only want you to know one thing, and realize it fully—I'm through with you, now—to-night! I've submitted to your insults and petty tyrannies for three years, I've condoned your infidelities, hidden your vices and weaknesses from the world, been your creature, your—woman. If you've paid, you had good value for your money! But it's over, now. I shall leave here to-morrow—no price which you could pay, would be high enough to induce me to remain another day beneath this roof!"

He approached her slowly, his eyes blazing, his thin face distorted with fury.

"It's over, is it? You're going to leave me, eh? We'll see, my beauty! Why, d— you, do you think —"

"Did Madame ring?" a third voice cut across the man's strident tones, and he wheeled, his face working, to discover Nina standing in the doorway. Her look and manner were respectfully inquiring, but in her eyes was a not uncertain gleam.

"Yes, Nina." Mary's voice was quite composed, and she turned from him, and walked steadily to her door. "I am going to bed. I shall want you."

She looked back over her shoulder, with her hand upon the knob, and said, quietly, "Good night, Gerald."

He mumbled a surly response, and she disappeared. The maid followed her, and he heard the key turn in the lock of the door.

The next morning at ten, he sauntered again into the boudoir. He was a little paler than usual, a trifle red-rimmed about the eyes, and the long, delicate, feminine hand holding his cigarette twitched nervously. He peered about him in the semi-twilight of the heavily-curtained room. He thought at first that it was empty, then he descried Mary, seated at her escritoire, busily engaged in writing. He saw to his surprise that she was dressed for the street, in a simple walking gown and small hat, but it conveyed nothing to his throbbing and still befuddled brain.

"Hello!" he remarked. "I say, you're up early."

He walked over to her, and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

She looked up at him, and nodded coolly, then bent again over her task. He saw that a little sheaf of

bills was outspread before her on the desk, and she was writing checks, and entering them in the stub of her bank book.

"See here, old girl, we had a rare old row last night, didn't we? I was a bit of a brute, I know, but I had rather too much champagne aboard, and I was jealous of young Cope-Herrington, upon my soul I was.— What do you say to a run down to Brighton in the car for the week-end? We both need a change, and it will buck us up, no end. Is it a go?"

Mary laid down her pen, and pushing back her chair she rose, and faced him.

"Gerald, have you forgotten? I thought I made myself clear, last night."

"Oh, I say! You surely weren't serious, Mary! We both lost our tempers a bit, but you couldn't have meant what you said, old girl!— I'll apologize, if you like. I was a damned rotter, I know, to speak to you as I did, but I was squiffy, and the way that chap looked at you drove me mad! Let's forget the whole bally business, and go off—"

"I'm sorry, Gerald. I never was more serious in my life, and I meant every word I said. I am going away to-day — and I go alone, with Nina. I thought that you understood that,— I hope there won't be a repetition of last night's scene."

Lord Eshelbury backed away from her.

"You can't mean it, Mary!" he repeated, hoarsely. "You can't mean to leave me, after three years, because of a stupid quarrel!"

"It isn't only because of last night," she explained, wearily, "although no woman who possessed a shred of self-respect — and even such a woman as I am, may happen to possess that, strange as it may seem to you,

— could remain here, after the insults you have hurled at me. It was only the culmination, that is all. We've had scenes like it before, if you remember, only not quite as bad. I have done my best, Gerald, I have tried to play fair, but it isn't of any use. The world is too wide for one to shut one's self in a corner of it which has become distasteful — hideous! And so, I am going."

"Where — will you go?" he sank heavily into a chair, and looked up at her dully, as she stood before him.

"Away from London, for a time at least. It doesn't matter where," she added, gently. "It's better, wiser for you not to know. Our ways part here, to-day."

"You can't go!" he cried, half incredulously, half fearfully. "Why, Mary, you belong to me, you're mine, *mine*, I tell you! We've been together too long —"

She shook her head, with a little smile.

"No, Gerald, you are wrong. This unconventional existence, this living together without the sanction of church or society isn't at all the sort of thing it appears from the outside. For the woman, if she plays fair, it has all the restrictions and drawbacks of matrimony, and none of its obvious advantages. But she has one compensation which is denied the woman governed by the rules and tenets of society — her life is bounded solely by necessity and inclination. We were both free to terminate our association when we pleased. I am free, and — it is my pleasure to go."

"You never cared a straw for me, did you?" he was staring straight before him, and a certain note

of wistfulness had crept into his voice. "You never cared."

"No, I didn't, Gerald," she replied, frankly. "You never asked me, or I should have told you the truth, in the beginning. I liked you, always, from the first time you came to my house in the Avenue Wagram, years ago. I left Paris with you because I was tired of the life there. You made me comfortable, you did your best, at first, to make me happy here, and I stayed on. But you've changed, gradually — perhaps we've both changed. Perhaps we've gotten on each other's nerves because there isn't anything real to hold us together. I have wondered why you did not pull out long ago — I've known, to put it mildly, of the preference you have shown to other women, from time to time —"

"Ah, these other women, what do they matter!" he cried, passionately. "It's different with you — you're my *wife*, Mary!"

"I'm not. I have been your mistress, a shade more important, perhaps, in your eyes, than the heroines of your occasional promiscuous adventures, but in the same category with them, nevertheless — a distinction without a difference. We've drifted too far apart, Gerald, to go on. Life has been growing more and more irksome and distasteful to me, every day. I had made up my mind to ask you last night after our guests had gone, if you would allow me to run away, quite by myself, into the country, somewhere, for a few weeks. I am inexpressibly tired of London, and everything it contains, and I thought I might get back my poise, my focus on things — might have an opportunity to think it all over, and decide on the future."

"Won't you do it now, Mary?" he asked, eagerly.

"Won't you let me send you away,—Ostend, Aix, Trouville, anywhere you say, for a month or so? Take Nina with you, and stop off at Paris and get some pretty frocks. I won't annoy you, I won't come anywhere near you, unless you send for me. Go and have a ripping old holiday—I'll ask no questions, I can trust you! Come back to me when you're ready.—What do you say?"

She shook her head again, patiently.

"No, Gerald, it's no good. Everything's over between us. You must understand—you must realize that. I shall never come back to you. Don't think that I'm ungrateful, that I don't appreciate all you've done for me—I do, but I can't go on, any longer." She turned to her desk, and took up the little sheaf of bills. "I've been settling up the accounts here—all the bills are paid, and the outstanding accounts are to be sent to my bank when they are due. I've arranged for everything—given the servants their notice and a quarter's pay in advance, and packed what things I possess which are of special value to me. Here are the keys of the house, please return them to the agent, when you've removed what you wish. The car will be back in the garage, at your disposal, at five this afternoon. That is all, I think."

He suddenly sprang from his chair, and caught her roughly in his arms.

"You shan't go, Mary!" he cried. "I can't let you go! I can't get on without you, I need you! I've been a brute, a rotter, I know, but I'll change, Mary, my word of honor I will! Give me another chance, dear,—don't leave me like this!"

She disengaged herself gently from his embrace.

"It's no use, Gerald, we've gone too far. When

you think it over, you'll be convinced that I'm right. We can't go on, and it's best for us both that we separate now. It is late — the car is at the door. I must go." She dropped her veil over her face, and turning, picked up her small hand-bag and gloves from the table where they had lain. Then she came to him and held out her hand. "Good-bye, Gerald.— No, it's best that I go down alone. Nina is waiting below.— I hope that you will be very happy — you know that you will always have my best wishes —"

Her voice failed her at the dazed hurt look in his eyes. He took her hand, and held it limply.

"Mary, if this is just a — a whim of yours, a caprice — if you should change your mind, you know, when you've thought it all over, just let me know, won't you? Send me a line at the Club, and I'll come to you, wherever you are. Mary, my girl, I can't — I can't say 'good-bye' to you!"

"Then I must say it, Gerald. Good-bye."

At the door she turned, and glanced back. He had fallen into his chair, his face in his hands, his shoulders bowed and shaking. Impulsively, she took a step toward him, stopped, and after a moment turned again resolutely and passed down the stairs, and out into the sunlight.

CHAPTER XIX

FOUR years later, a great liner was threading its way slowly among the swarm of lesser craft through the sparkling waters of New York Bay. It was a radiant day in late September, with just a hint of the coming autumn in the crisp snap of the air, which brought a tingling glow to the cheeks of the passengers as they crowded to the rail of the promenade deck to catch a first glimpse of welcoming, friendly faces, although they were still far from the dock. People were rushing about from group to group, saying hurried, excited farewells, and everywhere there was that air of suspense, and subdued but eager expectancy, which is incidental to a journey's end.

A slender figure in blue stood alone at the rail, far forward, straining her eyes ahead with the rest at the mass of tall obelisk-like buildings rising up seemingly out of the water before her. No one would be waiting to meet and welcome her, only strange faces and blank stares would greet her on every hand, but she viewed the future with serene contentment. Although she would be as a stranger in a strange land, she was content. The goal she had set herself to reach had been attained, the future lay before her as she had determined long ago that it should be. Mary Tinney was returning to her own country, to begin life anew.

The years had dealt kindly with her, despite the vicissitudes of her life. At twenty-nine she was the personification of radiant health, clear and sparkling-eyed,

with a buoyant, springing step, and a vivid joyous interest in everything about her which gave no hint of the years, nor the manner of their passing. Partly because of the strength of her young, clean body, partly because of a fortunate physical and psychological normality, dissipation or excess in any form which was so prevalent in women of her mode of life as to be almost inevitable, had held no temptation for her; her eyes were too indomitably fixed on the future, her whole being too firmly engrossed in the object she was striving to attain. Since love had come to her, unbidden and unwelcome, she had in time regarded it philosophically, as part of the price she had to pay, but although through all her subsequent experiences it had been ever present, to cry in her ears, and seek to drag her back, she had forged ahead relentlessly, in spite of its clutching hands about her heart.

And now she was free.— Free! Never again while she lived would there be need for her to give herself to any man, to submit to caresses which set her teeth on edge, to kiss when every nerve in her body shrank with repulsion, to smile when she longed to strike a blow!

One more self-imposed task remained to her. She would perform it, and then the way lay clear before her. In London, only a few days before sailing, she had run across Hilda Bickerstaff, the Englishwoman who had been her neighbor in the Impasse du Maine during that never-to-be-forgotten time seven years before. She had asked about one and another of her old friends, and at last, hesitatingly, she ventured the name of Richard Daingerfield. What she heard filled her with unspeakable sorrow. He had failed. His warring temperament, the evident cloud under which his genius had lain even in the old days, had proved too

strong for him, and he had succumbed to it helplessly, in the end. He had accepted his final defeat, and returned to America, broken in mind and body. Hilda had heard of him quite recently. Philip Giron had written her from New York, where his impossible ballet-girls had attained quite a vogue,— that he had met the sculptor, shabby and ill, but proud and overbearing as ever; that he had gone to his studio to see him, and had found him wretchedly housed, living obviously in extreme poverty. He intended to do something for him, he wrote, if Daingerfield would accept it, but it would be difficult to arrange, as he was of a temperament impossible. Mary had obtained Philip's address from Hilda, determined to seek him out at the first opportunity on landing, and together they would devise some means of aiding the man she had loved, without offending his pride; — by means of a mythical order perhaps, if he was able to work, but the details of the plan must be left until she had found Philip.

The years which had intervened since she had walked out of Lord Eshelbury's house in St. John's Wood had brought her many experiences, some fortunate, some calamitous, but withal Mary had prospered beyond her imaginings. True, there had been a dark time of illness and despair, when she had lain for months in a nursing home in Kensington, while her carefully hoarded savings melted away alarmingly, and her life hovered in the balance. But immediately after — when a wan, hollow-eyed shadow of her former self, she had ventured out into the world again,— had come the episode of the South American mine owner. On his passing, a Viennese banker had made his appearance, to be replaced in turn by a retired diamond broker of Amsterdam, and from then on had been plain sailing.

She was not fabulously wealthy, but her future was amply assured, and her jewels alone represented a substantial fortune.

She had continued to send money orders of varying amounts anonymously to the wretched home in Milltown, and during her return voyage a vague idea had come to her of sending a deputy — some one who would respect her confidence — to investigate the condition of the little household on Barren Street, and determine whether her generosity had proven a benefit or by the opportunity for dissipation had but augmented their misery.

The docks were reached in good time, and after the customs ordeal was over, Mary was conveyed to one of the huge caravansaries which had sprung up during her long absence with the newer mushroom growth of the city. She had looked about her in bewilderment, as the chauffeur skilfully guided her taxicab through the mazes of traffic to her hotel. The twelve years of her absence had wrought changes which appeared miraculous to her eyes. Familiar landmarks, which had stood out clearly in her somewhat hazy memory of her short sojourn in New York, had disappeared, and it was an unknown city which met her gaze.

She telephoned Philip Giron from her hotel, and learned that he was out of town, and would not return for two days, so there was nothing for her to do but wait.

Mary had brought no maid with her from the other side, and for a time she busied herself with unpacking and arranging the contents of her trunks. The length of her stay in the city would depend wholly on what plan she would be able to devise with Philip for the relief of Richard Daingerfield. After that had been accom-

plished, she would go away at once to some quiet backwater, far from the beaten path, and there begin the life she had determined upon.

With the coming of late afternoon, a restlessness grew upon her, and her rooms became oppressive, unbearable. She decided to go for tea to one of the new cosmopolitan restaurants. Perhaps among the throng of strange faces there might be one or two which she remembered, and she was curious to see what changes time had wrought.

She paused for a moment in the ornately gilded lobby to allow a group of men to pass out, and glanced over the barrier of palms into the vast restaurant. The countless little tables were crowded with gaily chattering people, whose voices mingled with the staccato music of the red-coated orchestra in a confused medley of sound.

The last man of the departing group started to pass her with a muttered apology, then halted rather uncertainly, and Mary glanced up to find him confronting her in amazed half-recognition. He was a stocky heavily-built man, flashily clothed, and he held an opulently banded cigar between two pudgy jewelled fingers.

A slight smile flickered across Mary's face.

"How do you do, Marcus," she said.

Marcus Beeman gasped, reddened, shifted his cigar hastily, and shook her extended hand with embarrassed vigor.

"Why — why, Mary!" he stammered. "Mary! I never should've known you! Where on earth have you been all these years?"

"Abroad. I only got in this morning, on the *Saxonic*. Fancy meeting you, of all people, on the very first day in America!"

"Come on, let's sit down here for a minute, an' chin." He drew her nervously to a cushioned seat in a recess of palms. Mary smiled again,—he had not asked her to go into the restaurant with him; evidently the years had brought discretion bred of added responsibilities.

"You're lookin' fine!" he added, as they seated themselves. "You must've made good, Mary. I knew you had it in you!"

"Yes," she assented, quietly. "I've — made good.— And you, Marcus?"

"Oh, so — so!" replied Marcus, with a ponderous attempt at lightness. "General manager of the firm now, and expect to be made vice-president before New Year's.— Oh, I'm a grand boy, all right! Family man now, you know. This was just a sort of a business meeting, this afternoon.— I don't often hit the bright-light places like this nowadays."

"Really!" Mary rejoined, in covert amusement. "Whom did you marry? That girl from the Middle West, somewhere,— St. Louis, wasn't it?"

"Not on your life!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "I married a nice little Jewish girl — swell kid from the Upper West Side. I got two fine boys."

"Oh, I'm glad, Marcus!" she added, mischievously. "You always were — domestic."

He shot a quick, uncertain glance at her;— could she be "guying" him? He opened his lips, but on second thought decided not to press the subject.

"I don't suppose you see many of your old friends, now," she went on, demurely.

"Not often."

"I've wondered about the Gattles. I lost track of them years ago. I should like to know how the world goes with them."

"Oh, they're all right. I see 'em now an' then. They're gettin' on fine,—got a big place down near Far Rockaway. Restaurant—shore dinners—that kind o' thing. Great place for motor parties. Why don't you look 'em up, sometime?"

"I think I will. I'd love to see Mabel again. What do they call the place?"

"Just 'Gattle's.' Well, Mary, I must run on,—got to catch the five-thirty for Arverne. Mighty glad I saw you, to-day."

"And I, to have seen you." She rose, and held out her hand again.

He took it, awkwardly, and held it for a moment.

"Say, Mary," he hesitated. "You—you haven't got any hard feelings about the past, have you? No regrets, or—or anything? I s'pose I didn't do just right by you, but—"

"Oh, Marcus, don't let us speak of it," she hastened to reassure him, heartily. "I've forgotten everything, long ago.— There hasn't been time for me to remember, but I have never allowed myself an instant of regret.— You must go, or you will miss your train. I hope that the next time I see you, you will be vice-president of your company."

"Thanks. I guess that's a sure thing, all right. Good-bye."

The headwaiter escorted her to a table, and she sat musingly drinking her tea, and nibbling at the tiny iced cakes before her. Marcus was very much the same, and yet there was an indefinable change. He had developed a decided paunch, and there were baggy lines beneath his eyes, and he was growing bald, but it was not in a physical way that the intangible difference manifested itself. Could it be that it was she who had changed,

that her experienced eyes saw beneath the prosperous front he boldly erected, to the innate vulgarity of the little man, with clearer discernment than had been vouchsafed her in the early days of her association with him? The cleverness which had so impressed her had been but meretricious shrewdness, the swaggering manner a merely pitiful aping of the demeanor of men of the world whom he had chanced to encounter. With a sigh and a smile she dismissed him from her thoughts.

She wondered what time had accomplished with Joe Gattle and his wife. Would she see them, also, with new eyes? She shrank from a meeting with them, yet at the same moment decided that she would motor out the next day, and surprise them. She would be able to judge then, through Mabel's eyes, the extent of the outward metamorphosis she herself had undergone.

The following day was clear and warm, and Mary thoroughly enjoyed the swift rush along the level country roads, the orchards and woodland on either side already aflame with the first early touch of frost and the air redolent of ripened fruit, and the wine-like odor of bursting grapes.

"Gattle's" was a long, low, imposing structure, its broad verandas sheltered by scarlet-and-white striped awnings, and the lawns dotted with blazing masses of autumnal blooms.

"Is Mrs. Gattle here?" Mary asked the headwaiter who came hurrying obsequiously toward her, impressed by the elegance of her appearance and the luxury of her hired car. "I should like to see her, please. No, I would rather not give my name — just say a very old friend."

She had timed her arrival carefully for the hour between late luncheon and early dinner, when there would

probably be the least number of guests about, and indeed only a few scattered tables were occupied. The place had a general air of cheerful bustle, however, which argued well for the prosperity of the establishment, and Mary was delighted that her old friends' lines seemed cast in pleasant places.

All at once there was a slight commotion in the doorway leading into the hall, then a ponderous figure emerged, and bore down upon her, and Mabel Gattle, beaming a gracious but puzzled smile, stood before her.

"Did you want to see me?" she began. "I'm Mrs. Gattle—"

"Oh, Mabel! Mabel!" Mary smiled, but there was a little quiver in her voice. "Don't you know me? Have I changed as much as that!"

"I—why—my Gawd, if it ain't Mary Tinney!" Two fat arms crushed her suddenly in a hearty embrace, and a moist, resounding smack was planted upon her cheek. "To think of it bein' you! Dearie, it's just grand to see you! Come right in to my own drawin'-room. We c'n talk better there, an' Joe's gettin' so dignified an' up in the air, he don't want me to be seen buttin' in with the guests. Say, Louee!" she turned to the headwaiter hovering near, and ordered. "You send me up two N' Orleans fizzes, an' I want 'em made with my own eggs, hear? Not the bar ones.

"Well, ain't it just wonderful!" she began again, when they were ensconced in her vividly upholstered drawing-room. "Joe an' me was only speakin' of you the other day, an' here you turn up! It ain't any wonder I didn't know you till you spoke, you've grown so grand and elegant! Lord, won't Joe be s'prised when he gets back from town!"

"You haven't changed a bit, Mabel. I should have

known you, anywhere," Mary returned, with a little moue of reproach.

"Oh, a woman don't change much, it's a kind of stationary time, I guess for women—'round fifty. I wouldn't look so darn dowdy, if Joe hadn't made me let my hair go back." She passed a plump hand over her drab-colored, grey-streaked pompadour, and sighed "Joe's got so refined since he's been runnin' this place, that there's no livin' with him. But how'd you know where we was, dearie? How've you been all this time?"

Mary told of her meeting with Marcus Beeman a few hours after landing on the previous day, and Mabel grinned appreciatively.

"I'll bet he was s'prised!" she remarked. "There's no use talkin', foreign get-up does do a lot for a woman. You're lookin' swell.— You ain't married, are you?"

"No, and I don't ever expect to be," smiled Mary; then she added, seriously. "I'll never have another man near me, Mabel. There won't ever again be need of my bothering with any one. I've all the money I want, now, and I've come home to live the way I want to."

"Now you're talkin'!" observed Mabel, admiringly. "You always was a wise one, Mary, for all you was so young an' kinder green. If other girls had had a sensible head on their shoulders like you, they ha' been well fixed now, too. I'm real glad for you, I can tell you. We've often wondered what became of you.— Never heard a thing after Frank come back from Europe, that time."

"I'm sorry, I really meant to write, Mabel, and not to lose sight of you. I don't know how it was I happened to stop writing." Mary was honestly contrite.

"Oh, I know how it is, when folks is away, like that,

for so long. They get busy with other things, an' forget," Mabel said, good-naturedly. "It don't make any difference now, so long's you're back for good."

"And Frank — how is he? Do you ever see him, now?" Mary asked eagerly. "I suppose you blame me for leaving him, Mabel, but I had to do the best I could for myself."

"No — I don't blame you," Mabel averred, slowly. "A girl's got to look after herself, o' course. He told me you were square with him. He was dreadful broke up over your leavin' him, when he first come back. Then he took up with Florrie Hendricks again, but things wasn't the same with them, ever, as before she run off with that jockey, an' you come along. You — you asked if we'd seen Frank? You don't know, then? You ain't heard nothin'?"

"Heard? Why, no. What is it? What has happened, Mabel?" Her voice quickened with concern as a startled premonition flashed through her mind at the older woman's change of tone.

"He's dead," replied Mabel, briefly.

"Oh, Mabel, when? How terrible! I never knew —"

"Three years ago. Caught pneumonia at Havre de Grace and never got over it. I went to see him, soon's I heard he was sick, an' he spoke about you. He never did forget you, Mary."

"Poor Frank. He was the kindest man, and truest gentleman I ever knew," Mary said, very gently.

"He was a good sport — a thoroughbred. When you've said that, you've said everything. A better feller never lived'n Frank Kelly. It was his tips give us our first good start towards this place."

"It's splendid, Mabel! You and Joe ought to be

very proud of it. It must be a great success, isn't it?"

"Success? Just wait'll you see it to-night! You've got to stay an' have dinner with us, an' stay all night, if you can. Joe won't hear of your runnin' right back to town, an' neither will I! O' course, you come at a bad time, just between hours like this, an' in the middle of the week. But Saturdays an' Sundays, an' any pleasant night, you can't get a table for love nor money! I got diamond earrings as big as hickory nuts, an' a mink coat down to my feet. I only wish't you'd been here last Sunday; — the whole 'Tambourine Girl' company was down, an' I had forty thousand dollars' worth o' diamonds on my front porch!"

Mary checked her rising amusement, and murmured appreciatively, and the entrance of Joe Gattle put an end to the conversation. His was the same genial personality she remembered so well. A little more ruddy, perhaps, a little more portly, with the added dignity of a sprinkling of grey in his hair and heavy moustache. He recognized her at once, and although, as ever, he had little to say, he beamed an unmistakably jovial welcome.

Mary dined with them, and then drove cityward in the soft moonlight of early evening. All was well with the Gattles, she thought, but the news of Frank Kelly's death had come as a blow to her, in spite of the fact that he had been out of her life for so many years. His face, as she had seen it last in London, stunned and mutely reproachful, rose before her in a dreamy haze. She found it difficult to shake off a strange, unaccountable sensation of his material presence, until she resolutely forced her thoughts from the past to that which was to be. There remained only to find Richard Daingerfield and

smooth his pathway, and then the future alone should hold her in its hands.

Philip Giron was as surprised at her unexpected entrance into his studio the next morning as her older friends had been, but she cut short his effusive greeting to voice the query uppermost in her mind.

"Daingerfield? Pauvre garçon, we shall go to heem togethaire. When I write to Mees Beeckairstaff that lettaire, telling of heem, I go again to see heem, and voilà! he have gone, departed! He ees pairhaps annoyed that I call, ashamed that I seek heem out and find heem in sooch gr-reat distress. Eet ees but a few days ago that I learn the new address of heem from one who was before a model of hees, and I promise myself that I go to heem on my r-return. The model, she say that he ees vere ill. I am enchanted that you go with me, Mad'moiselle Marie! In time of seeckness and trouble a woman always know just what to do, she have the delicate hand, the queeck brain, the savoir faire!"

As they rolled swiftly downtown, Mary tentatively suggested the other matter which was upon her mind.

"I have a — a charity, of sorts," she began. "There is a family in whom I am interested. They are mill-workers, all, even the little children. I have been sending them money, at odd times, since I left America, and without appearing, myself, in the matter, I want to find out, if I can, if this money has helped them, or hurt them; if it has benefitted them, or been spent in dissipation. They are wretched, ignorant people, and may not have used it for their own good. You understand, Philip?"

"But, certainly, I comprehend." He shot a quick glance at her. "What ees eet that you weesh to do?"

"To send some one there to investigate matters for

me. Some one who will be discreet, will not mention my name, nor arouse their suspicions that they are being watched, or openly inquired about. I wondered if you knew of such a person."

He thought for a moment, tugging at his wisp of moustache.

"Yes," he said, at last. "There is one, I theenk, who weel do what you r-require. He ees — how do you say? — cler-rk in the offeece of a friend of mine. A sharp fellow, vere clevaire and most discreet. I weel geeve to you the address of heem."

He scribbled upon a card, and placed it in her hand.

"This is so good of you, Philip!" she said. "I will send a note to him to-night.— Tell me how you like America? Hilda told me that you had become quite a famous person over here."

He shrugged his shoulders deprecatingly, his hands outspread.

"How I like America?" he repeated, with a smile. "Ah, Mad'moiselle Tinneé, I am not like one of your compatriots, who rests een Paris for two, three days on one of the tours of Monsieur Cook, and tells then for-evaire aftaire of hees eempressions of France! I do not yet know America, eet may not be for years that I shall know eet, perhaps nevaire, all. But what I have seen, eet ees wondairful, marvellous! Eet takes away the breath!"

"And your ballet-girls?" she pursued. "They have made a great reputation for you, haven't they?"

"Mes pauvres coryphees!" he sighed, in mock despair. "They have pairhaps achieved a vogue, for the moment. But, Mad'moiselle Marie, eet ees only since the Americains have given to them a cachet that I dees-covaire how really imposseeble they are; how badly

drawn, how hopeless! That ees, I fear, a penalty of success.— But we have arrive! Allow me, Mad'moiselle!”

A crooked, cobbled lane opening out of Greenwich village, littered with refuse and noisome with the thousand odors of a city's fetid waste; a dark hall-way and narrow staircase, past doors which but partially muffled coarse voices raised in rough mirth or strife within, and at the very top, a long, low, bare room, crowned with a skylight through which the sunshine straggled dimly, clouded by the filth of the dust-encrusted panes.

On an improvised couch-bed in a corner, a huge, gaunt frame lay, its sharp outlines barely concealed by the steamer rug flung carelessly over it. On a broken-down chair by the poor bed was a milk bottle, half empty, a bunch of grapes, and a vial of medicine.

Mary's eyes took in the pitiful details as she slowly approached, and her throat contracted as if iron bands were clamped about it, while she felt the sharp sting of tears upon her cheek. As she paused beside it the figure stirred and a face was suddenly lifted to hers;— a face which she scarcely recognized. It was smooth, and colorless, and as waxen as the marble for which he had lived, and the eyes in their sunken rims burned like coals of fire.

She knelt beside him and stretched out her arms over his wasted body, and her voice welled out in an agony of love and pity.

“Richard! I have found you! I have found you!”

CHAPTER XX

WITHOUT, the rush and soughing sweep of the wind through countless pines, accompanied by the occasional soft thud of a mass of packed snow sliding from the low, overhanging roof, and the ceaseless tapping and swirl of flakes against the panes, like the coaxing summons of fairy fingers.

Within, before a roaring fire of birch and pine-cones; Richard Daingerfield's gaunt figure lay outstretched upon a comfortable couch. His head was supported upon one waxen hand and he was gazing into the leaping flames with a serene tranquillity of expression from which had vanished, as if by a miracle, all traces of the passions which had sullied it when the storm and stress of life had held him in its grasp. He who had warred so despotically yet so impotently with the conditions of the existence in which he had found himself, seemed in the time of his passing, to have been vouchsafed a clearer insight, a new and broader understanding, and with the greater knowledge, an exceeding peace had come.

He turned, as some one entered softly from the outer hall and approached the firelight, and smiled — that wonderful, radiant smile of his which in the old days had been like a shaft of light thrown suddenly across the enshrouding gloom of his stormy mood.

"Mary, my dear," he said, "some day I shall model you as 'Nemesis' — with a medicine bottle and spoon!"

Mary laughed softly, and deposited the articles he

had ruefully derided, on a small stand at his side. Then with the deftness and ease born of long practice she put her arms gently about him, and drew him up on his pillows.

"Indeed you will not!" she replied cheerily. "When you are well, you will forget that there is such a thing as medicine in the world. I will pose for you as Bacchante, or Leda, if you will get a stuffed swan. I don't like the live ones, they are such greedy, conceited things!"—

"Or the 'Snow Maiden,'" Richard responded, thoughtfully. "As you were that day last week, with the frost clinging to your hair, and your arms full of those great, snow-laden pine boughs."

"Oh, and that snow-man you made,—wasn't he wonderful? I suppose I shouldn't have allowed you to dabble about in the wet and cold like that, I'm afraid it brought on this little set-back, but he was such a marvellous person I couldn't bear to stop you. I wish he had been modelled in clay, or something less perishable, but he lasted a good while, didn't he?"

"He is gone now, however." A little greyish pallor overspread his emaciated face as he spoke, and his eyes wandered back to the dancing flames on the hearth. "There isn't a trace of him left."

He shivered slightly, and Mary pulled the rug up closer about him, and knelt to replenish the half-consumed logs. For the moment her buoyant heart failed her, and she could find no words to turn aside his unspoken thought. At first, when a renewal of strength had come with the change to the soft, balmy air of the Adirondacks, he had made ceaseless plans for the indeterminate future, when he should be well, and his soaring ambition knew no bounds, but of late a change

had taken place, and he talked but seldom, save in gentle raillery, of the days which were to come.

Mary observed the difference of his mood with a sinking heart. Could his lack of interest, his flagging ambition, his preoccupied association from all that had held him to life presage the approach of the end? She fought against it with all her strength, and strove to whip into flame again the smouldering spark of his genius, but the attempt was vain. He seemed content to drift languidly in the present, accepting her indefatigable care with pathetic gratitude, and obeying uncomplainingly her behests.

The doctor, who came twice daily from the great sanitarium nearby, could give her little reassurance, in answer to her anxious queries. Her uncle might live for several months, possibly until the warm weather came, but hemorrhage might develop at any time. It was difficult to determine, but the patient was of course in a very advanced stage.

Richard had been very ill for many weeks after Mary's discovery of him in New York, and the doctor she had summoned had recommended Saranac as soon as he was able to be moved. By posing as his niece, she had been able to evade successfully any embarrassing questions which might have been asked as to their relationship. It had been a simple matter to deceive Richard. He had been too ill at first to be cognisant of anything which went on about him and later the gentle apathy enveloped him. He did not seem to question in his own mind what her presence meant, nor why she was ministering to him, but to accept her being with him as a matter of course. He had at first been mildly curious to know how the luxuries with which he was surrounded had been supplied, and on being told of

the sale of two of his statues in New York — it was a sudden inspiration on Mary's part — he dismissed it from his thoughts as of no further interest in this curiously remote, detached sphere in which he was to tarry for a little while before going on.

He seldom referred to their earlier, abruptly terminated friendship in Paris, only once or twice, when he spoke regretfully of the fact that "their statue" had not been the success of which he had dreamed.

If it was the refinement of torture to Mary to see the new, gentle light in his eyes as they followed her patiently, ceaselessly, and the gradual shrinking and weakening of his once powerful frame, as his listless steps each day dragged and shortened, she gave no perceptible sign. Perhaps, when it was all over, and her world had ended in chaos, she might herself break down, but now she was storing her energy, determinedly guarding her strength for the sake of the one who leaned upon her, to help them both through the dragging ordeal, and the final dark hour.

If she could keep him with her until the summer came, the warm months would give them an almost certain respite — of what must happen with the arrival of autumn she would not allow herself to think. She must store up in her memory for all the bleak, weary years to come the golden moments of a joy almost solemn in its intensity — the moments, all too quickly passing, of this pure companionship with the man who was master of her soul.

The winter months passed quickly, and with the coming of the first warm winds from the south, the first hint of bird-song in the air and springing green among the silvery birches, a miraculous change came to Richard. His dragging steps lightened, his eyes glowed

with almost their former vigor, and a faint color flushed his cheeks. Mary was tremulous with delight, a hope flaring up as a candle flickers, but the doctor viewed the change with his usual impassive calmness, and did not commit himself.

Some of the apathy, too, seemed to have fallen from Richard, and he was given to half-shy confidences, which, apropos of nothing in particular, appeared to spring from his lips in an involuntary expression of some train of thought long locked within his breast. Mary began dimly to realize how morbidly solitary the man's life had been, how through the years he must have held himself in the sternest, fiercest repression, from which the only outlet had been the occasional bursts of rage which had rendered him so incomprehensible to those who would have been glad to be his friends, and the strange, diabolic humor which had led him to deliberately deface his own greatest conceptions in bitter mockery and contempt. She wondered more and more what wretched experience had been his, in the days which were gone; what story, as Hilda Bickerstaff had once suggested, might lie behind his reticence, his long self-repression. He had changed in his whole nature so utterly since this illness had come upon him, perhaps he would unburden himself of this trouble, whatever it had been,—but in the face of his calm serenity she felt that the mark of even this ancient grief or wrong, had been lifted forever from him.

It was midafternoon, and they were seated on the shore of the lake. A little breeze had sprung up and rippled the surface of the waters, and the sun shone gloriously down upon them. She had fancied him asleep, but as she bent over him he looked up with his sudden, swift smile.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, softly. "You are quite warm enough? This rug—"

"Quite," he answered. "Come, sit here beside me and tell me why you are so very kind to me? You were not always so, you know. You refused once to do me a very great service because you had listened to something which was not meant for your ears."

He was smiling, his tone was that of gentle, weak raillery which had become habitual in his communings with her, and which served but poorly to mask his tenderness of gratitude. She understood him perfectly, as always, now.

"Ah, but I have atoned!" she cried. "I did get over that stupid resentment, and come to you to pose — and you see it was no use — I was not suitable, I didn't have it in me, somehow."

"You have atoned?" His thin, fevered hand rested quietly on hers for a moment. "But why — why have you done this? Why have you given up these months to the care of me, shut away from all the world?"

"It was so that you might get well quickly, and let me pose for you once again, and make me famous!" she answered, hastily, eagerly, the old, old fabrication rushing to her lips.

He shook his head slowly, his serene eyes gazing out over the waters of the lake.

"No, Mary, my dear. It's of no use — that brave, kind, foolish little lie of yours. I shall never get well. The end will come soon, now. — No!" he silenced her, as she seemed about to interrupt him. "I feel it — here. I have known for a long time. And now, when I look back everything seems so clear to me, and of so little account —"

He paused for a moment, and then went on musingly, as if to himself.

"It was so trite! It's happened in hundreds of lives; you must have seen scores of wretched variations of it. Yet to me it came as an overwhelming tragedy, and I wondered why it did not shake the world to its foundations, as it had crushed and shaken me. My wife, and — my dearest friend. That's all. It's the plot of half the plays and stories in the world. But I idolized my wife, worshipped her as a pure being, unapproachable by the sins of the world. My friend was another self, like a part of me. I would have trusted them both with my soul. I did trust them with it, — and they took it between their hands, and warped and twisted it, and threw it back to — to me, maimed. Even my little son, whom I adored, whom I had meant to make the greatest artist of the age, — the little son, whom for ten years I had thought flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone. He was not — mine. . . . When I left the country and tried to take up my life and my work again, I found that some devil had come to dwell within me, to mock at my purest, highest inspirations, with the venom of my own faith-destroying experience. And I trusted no man, and hated all women. And now, at the end, it all seems such a futile thing, of so little moment, after all —"

His voice trailed off into silence, and she sat mutely, not daring to speak. When she ventured to look at him, she found that his hollow eyes were closed, and he slept.

Not long after that day, a week or two at most, she was sitting beside his couch in the soft darkness on the sleeping-porch, watching the pale moon climb slowly from behind the silver birches and flood the flawless mir-

ror of the lake with a pure, cold light. If these transforming months had wrought a change in the dying man, a clearer vision into the heart of life, it had brought no less a miracle to the woman's soul. She seemed to see no longer with the eyes of her hardened, narrowed mind, but with a purer, more illuminating understanding, which radiated from a hitherto unsounded depth within her, and opened vistas of truth which before had been hidden from her conception. These weeks of quiet contemplation had been but a prelude, a preparation for the supreme moment which this night was to bring, when the true knowledge of the Wherefore of things was to be vouchsafed her. How blind she had been, how helpless and hopeless, believing in her mind, stunted and warped by heredity and hardship, that the world was a pitiless and crushing thing, and there was no way in which to walk save the way of sin! There had seemed to her no other way because she had lifted her eyes from her unending toil only to the first painted woman who had crossed her path, the first man who had glanced at her with a hunter's lustful gleam. Had there indeed been no other way? Was there none other *now* for women still in the state she had endured thirteen years before? She would have been content with so little — just some hours free for study, and rest, and play, a clean place to sleep, a living wage. For these she would have worked honestly, cheerfully, with the best effort of mind and body, but they had been denied her. Must other women follow the path she had chosen, because there was no one to make their lives endurable, to force those who ruled their destinies at the mills to ease their lot? — To force them, not by mob rule, by strikes incited by fanatics which left their condition pitifully worse than be-

fore, but by the enactment of wise, sane laws and the enforcement of them; by recreation hours and recreation places, and the means to educate them to an enjoyment of them, and to the betterment of their home-life? She would look well into this, she would study the situation, and then, if conditions had not improved, *she* would act! She had an education, a clear head, sound judgment and a thorough knowledge, at first hand, of the lives of these people.

Her money would do much, in a modest way, her efforts would interest more capital, to buy the necessary legislature, if the administration in power refused to give it honestly; to erect suitable, sanitary dwelling-places, schools, churches, libraries, clinics. To insure to the men a more interesting place to foregather in their hours of relaxation than the corner saloon; to give the women a knowledge of how to create and maintain a home where cheer and cleanliness and sunshine could abide, and where a little rest might now and then be vouchsafed them, that they might bring into the world little ones with the birthright of clean, sturdy bodies and unstunted minds; — and to keep the children themselves from the mills. To give them their golden youth, their play-time. Ah, God! to keep the little, little children from the mills!

The life upon which she had decided for herself in the days of her sullen resentment against her condition — that life of ease and indolence and stagnation to be spent in gloating over the fortune she had filched from the honor and integrity and purity of the world; how base it seemed now, in the light of her newer understanding! How base and how — foolish! What a useless waste of precious years!

Motherhood was a sacred trust, a sovereign privilege accorded to women; but there were other trusts, other privileges which were granted to some favored ones without reference to sex which were equally sacred — the welfare of their fellow men. Mary's people should be her children — the class from which she had sprung should be her sacred trust, and if she could but make smooth their way, if only a little, if she could make some men the cleaner, and women the wiser and little children the happier, she might, when the end came, have justified the reason for her existence; have proved her right to have lived, have atoned in part for her years of mistakes, and groping in the mire and darkness. Her rebellion, her outlawry against the divine edict of right and wrong could never be justified; for that there was, there never could be, any justification. But she could make atonement, in part.

And then the great inspiration came, the great conviction was born! It was for this, that she had been allowed to live, to prosper. For this she had been allowed to prosecute her selfish plan, only to find her reward dead sea fruit. For this, her great love had been sent, her suffering, her final solemn joy had been vouchsafed her of protecting and caring for the object of that love in the last hours before the end! — That she might be able to teach, to give of her experience for the betterment of the world! She had been chosen, had been appointed to be the scapegoat, the sacrifice, that her people might be aided; that, bearing the burden of her own sins, forever, she might guide her sisters of the shut-in places of labor, and poverty, and ignorance to steer their own frail craft into sunlit waters of peace, and simple happiness, and clean lives.

Self-preservation was the primal law of life; but there

was a higher, divine law which had been revealed to her, the law which had been preached by an humble Man, the Carpenter of Galilee, many years before she had taken her place at the loom of life. Of that law, she would, however lowly and unclean, be a disciple. And by that motionless figure on the couch beneath the stars, she knelt in sudden exaltation of spirit.

She was filled with great happiness and a serene peace. As a newly-created mother rests after her labors, so Mary rested, for in her had been borne a great and solemn truth, and her joy of it was mingled with awe.

So she remained, and the moon paled, and the star-points twinkled and disappeared. A sweet, mysterious hush filled the air and the little breeze which heralds the dawn of a new day came whispering and sighing through the birches and cedars. A sudden ephemeral mist enveloped them, then lifted slowly, imperceptibly, in the east, and a faint roseate beam of light radiated like a benediction upon them.

Mary touched the pale hand which hung limply from the side of the couch. It was icy cold! With a swift convulsive stab of her heart, she leaned over and gazed into the still face of Richard Daingerfield.

There was no need of a second glance. He had slipped away from her in the star-lit darkness, quietly, with no tearing struggle, or vain effort to stay the inevitable hand. Peacefully, after the storm and stress of his life, he lay with his placid face toward her, his hand outstretched, as if in the last supreme moment he had realized everything which her unspoken love for him had meant, and had turned to where he knew she would unfailingly be, at his side, in a mute farewell.

With a little moaning cry she flung herself beside him, and hid her face upon his quiet breast.

CHAPTER XXI

"DIDN'T know you had a house-party on, or I shouldn't have run in on you like this." Porter Hawxhurst's tone was meant to be apologetic, but he gazed about rather resentfully at the tea preparations on an elaborate scale in the great hall.

"No, I don't suppose you would, Porter dear. I know how you hate fuss and bother and meeting people. But Lester and I never do know when you are going to drop in from the ends of the earth, somewhere," his sister replied with spirit. Mrs. Lester Birkenshaw was a stout, blonde little woman with the figure of a pouter-pigeon and the mind of a canary. She looked very like the latter, as she stood perched on the lowest step of the wide staircase and scolded away at her tall brother, giving him affectionate little pats upon his arm and shoulder as she spoke. "You do look awfully well, dear,—browner and taller than ever, and that dreadful scar on your cheek from your Heidelberg days has almost disappeared, thank goodness! Oh, Porter, it is so good to have my big brother home! Do you know you've been away for five whole years, this last time? You must stay for months, to make up for it."

"Sorry, Anita," he replied, laconically. "I'm off to India in a month with Prescott Lawton."

"Oh!" she murmured. "Isn't that too dreadful! Other girls' brothers stay home *some* of the time!"

"Who've you got here — any one I know?"

"Oh, yes, the Maxwell girls, and the Richardsons, and Harper Goodrich and Ruth Marryot —"

"Ruth Marryot! Didn't I meet her the last time I was home? Isn't she a tall, ungainly young person, with buck teeth and eye-glasses, studying for the law, and terrifyingly brainy?"

"She is,—and aren't you ashamed to describe her like that? She's quite the most important woman in the state, now, and one of the most talked-of in America. She's abolished child labor in the mills and factories in this part of the country, and accomplished wonderful reforms among people of those classes, and she'll do it all over the United States before she's through, if she isn't stopped!"

"How'd she do it?" Her brother sat down on the arm of a great carved chair, and looked up quizzically at her. "Not by fledgling eloquence—it isn't done this season!"

"No," admitted Mrs. Birkenshaw. "She's just the mouthpiece, so to speak, of another woman, a Mrs. Tyndale, who appeared here while you've been away, and bought the Aymar estate. You'll meet her this afternoon. She's a youngish widow, and perfectly charming. She seems to be very rich, and she gives her life up to this factory-workers scheme, but she never comes forward openly in it, just gives her money, and brains, and works tirelessly in the background, and gives Ruth Marryot the honors. She doesn't care for society, and seldom goes anywhere, but I'm crazy about her. She's simply stunning-looking—red-gold hair, great masses of it, and odd, long yellowish eyes. . . . Let's go up to the twinnies before everybody gets home from the country-club. You haven't seen them since they were mites of babies, and they're crazy about their globe-trotting uncle!"

An hour later, the widow with the red-gold hair, Mrs.

Tyndale, stood greeting her hostess in the wide hall, and looking about her at the pleasant scene. The gaily chattering groups of young women and men in cool-looking tennis flannels made pretty pictures against the dark oak panelling, and the subdued laughter of their clear well-bred voices mingled refreshingly with the tinkle of porcelain and glassware, and the silvery tones of the cathedral clock striking five. It was all charming, and she was glad that she had ventured out of her self-imposed seclusion, for an hour. There was no jarring note in the harmony of the moment. As she smilingly replied to Mrs. Birkenshaw, she glanced at the stairway. A man was descending who had not been at the country club with the rest; she could not yet see his face distinctly, but something in his manner, his bearing, seemed faintly, oddly familiar.

He stepped from the last step of the stairs, and in answer to Mrs. Birkenshaw's imperious nod, he slowly approached them.

It seemed to Mrs. Tyndale's horrified ears that a sudden, sickeningly-significant hush had fallen, and a swirling blackness seemed to arise from beneath her feet and billow upward, out of which one face alone stood forth; — the face of a man who had crossed at three previous psychological moments in her career. The man with the scar!

After what seemed to her to be an interminable length of time, the voice of Mrs. Birkenshaw pierced her consciousness, faintly, as from across an immeasurable distance.

"Mrs. Tyndale, I want you to know my wandering brother, Porter Hawxhurst."

Summoning her dazed faculties to her aid, Mrs. Tyndale murmured a few conventional words — she never

afterward knew quite what — and he bent low over her hand. Then he raised his head, and looked swiftly into her eyes, and in that brief, keen glance she read complete recognition and a great question.

He brought her tea, and she forced herself to take the cup from his hands, to drink composedly and to reply to his conventional platitudes with remarks as politely banal as his own. Finally, to her momentary relief, the groups about them broke up, and he wandered away to join others. She talked animatedly to those about her; her silvery laugh even rang out occasionally, in company with the others, in sweet, well-modulated tones. And all the while her desperate, despairing thoughts were pounding against the walls of her brain. What would he do? What would he do? That his action would be quick and decisive she realized as surely and instinctively as she had realized that he recognized her, that he had always known what manner of woman she was. Pride of birth and breeding was no more evident to her world-trained eyes now than they had been to her girlish perceptions sixteen years before, when first she had beheld him. He would at all costs, she knew, protect his sister from any knowledge of, or association with a woman of the world from which she had emerged. Would he denounce her immediately, and drive her forth from her Eden, or would he stay his hand until she could have a talk with him — could show him the truth? That was the question which burned in her brain.

That he was trustworthy, would keep her faith inviolate — if once he knew the truth, and could reconcile it to his convictions of the conventional protection and respect due to his family and their friends — she felt assured. But was he humanly capable of reconciling

his views of life with what she had been, in spite of what she had become? She knew that, given the opportunity her one hope lay in telling him the truth; — nay, more, in *showing* him, and then, with no plea for sympathy, or leniency, leaving her future in his hands, for him to render the decision which would mean her peace or exile. Would he grant her this opportunity, or would he strike first?

It was with a sense of infinite relief that she beheld him gradually but deliberately making his way back to her, and as the last of the callow, flannelled youth who had surrounded her arose, he took the vacant seat beside her with a slight inclination of request.

“Nice little gathering of young people my sister always has about her, Mrs. Tyndale,” he began. “You know, I travel about quite a bit, and only come home at long intervals. I like to watch the kiddies, and see what they develop into.”

“It is — interesting, isn’t it?” she murmured. “You’re quite a — a globe-trotter, I understand, Mr. Hawxhurst?”

He nodded, slowly, his face turned from hers.

“Yes. I don’t care very much for places of so-called interest, historic spots, cathedrals, picture-galleries —” he broke off abruptly, with involuntary significance. Then went on: “I like to watch people — all sorts and conditions of people, — and know not so much how they live, their customs and manners, and all that, as how they feel, what they think. That sounds rather indecently prying, but really I’m not. I’m a solitary sort of individual, and it’s a hobby, an idiosyncrasy of mine. But I like to run home now and then, and be with my sister and Lester and their friends. That very august young lady over there, for instance —

Miss Marryot. I've known her since she was in short skirts, and liked chocolates — now my sister tells me that she is doing a wonderful thing; improving conditions, sanely and practically, among a certain grade of laboring people, and doing it well."

"She is! Indeed — indeed she is!" Mrs. Tyndale turned to him, with glowing eyes. "If you could only know how much she has accomplished!"

"I should like to know." He leaned forward, deliberately, and looked full in her face. "I should like to know, not only because of Miss Marryot's own achievements, but because my sister has told me state secrets. — You are the power behind the throne, are you not? You are the silent partner?"

"Mr. Hawxhurst!" A quick thought, a sudden hope was born, and sprang into full strength. "I — I do what I can, of course, because it is now my life-mission. But Miss Marryot does the great work, the work which accomplishes, and lives! Are you really interested — in our work?"

"Tremendously interested. So much so, that I should like to know more — all that you can tell me concerning it."

Was it — could it be a truce that he was offering her; — an opportunity to justify, to prove herself?

"Suppose I do more than tell you — if you are interested. Suppose I *show* you, Mr. Hawxhurst? You must forgive me — you know we fanatics are always over-eager for converts — but I wonder if you would care to accompany me to-morrow on a — a sort of unofficial round of inspection. I am going in my car to a manufacturing place not thirty miles from here, called Milltown. You may be interested in seeing what material changes Miss Marryot has accomplished

among the actual workers. Would you care to come?"

"I shall be delighted. At what time will you start?"

"At eleven. And I go rain or shine, Mr. Hawxhurst. I live at the old Aymar place, Sunny Meadows."

"I will be very much interested, Mrs. Tyndale, in looking over the work with you. Thank you for presenting me with the opportunity."

All that night Mrs. Tyndale paced the floor of her room ceaselessly, in an agony of indecision. It was a truce, of course, with Porter Hawxhurst, but an armed truce. Suppose she did succeed, on the morrow, in absolutely convincing him of her own complete sincerity in her present useful life; — would he still permit the woman of the half-world of Sheepshead, of Monte Carlo, of Paris, of Heaven-knew-where-else, the entrée into his sister's home, the association with people of gentle birth and irreproachable breeding, and blameless lives? Could he be expected to? Would any man of the world permit it?

She meant to try. She meant to bare her soul and her life as she had bared it to none, not even Baron Iverskoi, on that memorable night on the balcony of their apartments in Rome, when he had told her gently that the end had come for them, and she in turn had given expression to a little of that which dominated her then half-awakened, half-developed being. It seemed like a hideous betrayal of her people, that thing which she meant to do, and yet they would never know, and if by any miraculous chance they should ever be cognisant of it, it would mean nothing to them.

The following day dawned with a brilliant metallic sunlight, and an overpowering, still heat which gave a hint of possible electric storm before night.

Mr. Hawxhurst arrived promptly on the hour and they started on their run — short, in the heyday of powerfully cylindereed machines — over the smooth, wide, perfectly packed roads.

They talked but little, and that desultorily. The minds of both were too surcharged with that which must in the end be said between them, to admit of the effort to manufacture small talk, and the conventional cloak could not yet be dropped between them. She talked feverishly, but in a general way, of the work which had been accomplished, and of that which was still to be done, and he listened. His attention was comprehensive, but his eyes were upon her, and without realizing it, in her inwardly perturbed condition, they were quickened and held there, with a more profound intensity than ever, in their previously widely diversified encounters.

They passed swiftly through miles of rolling green country-side, the hot winds blowing in their faces and the white dust rising behind them in billowing clouds. Villages, with their rows of trim white-painted cottages behind narrow hedges of box and privet, and their little shops set primly forth in line, sped by them, and now and then they rumbled over a railroad track, half-hidden behind a widened curve.

At length, they came to a little town upon the bank of a river. It was squalid and low-lying, with a few mean and tawdry shops displaying putrid and fly-specked wares, and many saloons, basking sullenly and without signs of life in the glare of the sun. On the hill, back of the town, a great cluster of mills and manufactories stood, their smoke-stacks looming like spires raised to the god Mammon, and belching forth a steady stream of black and noisome smoke.

The heart of the woman in the motor-car contracted within her, and the pounding veins upon her temples seemed about to burst with their pent-up flow. This was Milltown! This was her birthplace, the scene of her early struggle and toil and suffering, and emancipation. Since the night, many years ago, when, with a borrowed raincoat to cover her sorry rags, she had fled bitter, and resentful, and wanton in her despair, she had never returned, not even in the last two years when her own awakened spirit had instigated and made possible the marvellous changes which met her eye, as the car rounded the hill.

The work was of course in an embryo state, as yet; — a few rows of concrete workmen's cottages set in trimly-kept flowering door-yards, a school, a library, and a large hall, to serve as a clubhouse and meeting-place. That was all, but her heart filled with joy and contentment when she contrasted it in her mind with her memories of the wretched hovels on Barren Street, the stench, and filth, and rioting drunkenness, and disease, and squalid misery. And the one aspect of all that she saw which filled her cup to overflowing, was the sight of the children! Little children everywhere, hordes of them, clustered in the door-yards, romping in the school playground, in the clean, macadamized street; — laughing, shouting, racing about in the unfettered abandonment which only childhood knows.

Completely forgetting herself, forgetting the issues at stake with the man beside her, who had been silently watching her glowing face, she turned to him, impulsively.

"Oh, do you see them!" she cried ecstatically. "Do you see the children, playing in the sunshine, happy and well-fed looking, and decently clothed! Not

pinched, and starved, and cold, and abused, bending their little weary bodies over countless machines in a dark filthy place, their ears dulled by the ceaseless humming and roaring, their eyes strained, their spirit broken, their hearts shrunken and dead within them! Isn't it a wonderful thing?"

"It is a blessed thing!" he replied, in a low voice.

"And it's not for this generation alone;—each generation to come shall be healthier, and happier, and better educated,—and therefore more efficient workers. But the main thing, the supreme thing, is that they shall be — happy!" Her voice broke, and she turned her face away, as if not daring to say more.

They neared the end of a row of dwellings on the outskirts of the little model settlement, and Mrs. Tynedale told her chauffeur to stop.

"Mr. Hawxhurst," she said, very deliberately. "I am going into this cottage, and I should like to have you accompany me, if you will. I shall pretend to feel ill, and ask for a glass of water. These people within will not know who I am, but I want you to look at them closely. I will tell you why, later."

He glanced at her curiously as he nodded assent, but did not speak, and they went in silence up the little flagged path, and knocked upon the door.

After some delay, a shuffling step was heard within, and the door opened.

A woman stood there, regarding them sullenly. She was a thin, draggled-looking creature, seemingly about forty years old, with lack-lustre eyes, and the sharply hued face of a shrew. She eyed them sullenly, without curiosity, making no move to admit them. For a moment there was silence, then she spoke abruptly, harshly.

"Well? What is it you want?"

There was no need for Mrs. Tyndale to simulate illness. She had turned suddenly very pale, and although she essayed to speak, no words came from her lips. It was Porter Hawxhurst who took the initiative.

"We were motoring by your house, and this lady was taken ill. She feels a little faint. Will you allow her to come in for a moment, and sit down — and will you please give her a glass of water?"

After a minute of irresolution, the woman stepped aside surlily, and allowed them to enter.

The room into which they stepped was bare and unspeakably dirty. What few sticks of furniture it contained were broken, and for the most part propped against the wall. In a rickety rocking-chair drawn up in a patch of sunlight by the window, an old woman's figure sat huddled. She was weazened and shrunken, and as they entered she drew her shawl nervously about her thin shoulders, and peered at them suspiciously from between the wisps of her grey hair. She might have been anywhere from fifty to eighty years old. Two half-grown children, a boy and a girl, sat quarrelling viciously in a corner, but their strife ceased at the strangers' intrusion, and they stared vacantly at them.

The woman who had admitted them swept a heap of soiled clothing to the floor from a chair, and dragged it forward.

"There," she said. "Sit down.— Don't want a doctor, d'you? My husban's at the mill, but Jim, here, could git one fer you, I s'pose."

"Oh, no, thank you," Porter Hawxhurst replied hastily. "The lady will be quite all right in a minute. The water, please."

When she brought it, in a cracked tumbler, he handed

her a dollar, which she grasped eagerly, and somewhat unbent in manner.

Mrs. Tyndale drank deep of the water, and then handed the glass back to the woman, trembling visibly as their hands met.

"Thank you," she murmured, in a low voice. At her words the old woman in the chair pushed her hair from her eyes, and leaned forward with a start, gazing fixedly at her visitor. Then, with an indistinct mutter, she settled back in her chair.

"Do you, too, work at the mill?" Porter Hawxhurst asked, pleasantly, of the younger woman. She stared back at him.

"Me? No. I got ter stay home, an' take care o' the house, an' Ma. There ain't no one else in the family but my son, Bill, an' he don't do nothin'. Jus' er town loafer, like his pa before him — my first husban' I mean."

The lady rose. Her weakness had passed, and when she spoke, her voice had steadied.

"I am better now. We must be getting on. Thank you for your courtesy."

She nodded to the woman in the chair, and hurried out as if in a nervous terror and anxiety to be gone. Porter Hawxhurst followed her in silence. He did not raise his eyes to hers now, and there was a strained, shocked look upon his face.

"Drive down past the mills to Barren Street, please, William. You cannot mistake it; it is the first turning by the blacksmith's shop," she directed, and seated herself, her face averted from her companion.

They drove slowly down the narrow, littered street. Most of the weather-beaten, tumble-down shacks were

empty, their windows blank, and staring like sightless eyes, their sagging doors swinging on single, rotting hinges.

Before one of these hovels, smaller, meaner, and more disreputable even than the rest, Mrs. Tyndale told the chauffeur to slow down.

"There, Mr. Hawxhurst. Do you see this wretched shell of a house? It was the dwelling-place for many years of the people we have just left. Contrast their present position and surroundings with this, and you can readily see the importance of the work Miss Marryot and I are endeavoring to accomplish."

"It is frightful, isn't it!" Porter Hawxhurst gave a shuddering glance at the miserable hovel, and turned to her.

She motioned the chauffeur to drive homeward.

"But as to what you say you and Miss Marryot are trying to accomplish! My dear Mrs. Tyndale, see what you have already accomplished! It is a wonderful work, a stupendous task!"

"It is only just begun," she replied, earnestly. "The laws to increase the wage of the workers, regulate their hours, and keep the little children from the mills — they took almost two years to achieve, and much influence, which Miss Marryot was able to obtain, fortunately, and capital. We have very little money left to enlarge the settlement and start upon others. We must interest capitalists and philanthropists — but that is for the future. As for the present, Miss Marryot is heart and soul in the work, and I — it is my whole life."

The homeward journey was a comparatively silent one. He asked intelligent and searching questions concerning the settlement, and she replied comprehensively,

but there was a tension in the air, and a sense of repression between them which neither cared to break down.

The run was a short and rapid one, for the electric storm which the morning had presaged was now swiftly approaching, and they fled before it.

They reached her door just as the first menacing roll of thunder reverberated over them.

"I won't ask you to come in now, Mr. Hawxhurst," Mrs. Tyndale said, hurriedly. "I—I am very tired, and William shall hurry you home before the storm descends upon you. Will you come for tea to-morrow afternoon, and I will tell you more—of the work." Then she added, with deliberate significance, "All you wish to know."

Porter Hawxhurst bowed.

"Thank you for to-day, Mrs. Tyndale," he said. "I shall be very glad to come."

CHAPTER XXII

He found her the following afternoon in the garden. She was still colorless, but quite composed, and the strained, haunted look of the previous day was gone from her steady eyes.

She gave him her hand, gravely.

"I thought we might have tea here in the garden," she said. "It is more pleasant than the house, on a warm day like this."

"You've quite recovered from your fatigue of yesterday?" he asked, as they seated themselves on an old stone settle under the maples.

"Oh, quite. It was more mental than physical, I fancy—"

"That sounds as if I had bored you," he smiled.

"Ah, no! I rather imagine my brain is composed of poor stuff. Whenever I think hard, it tires out, and goes on strike. And I have been thinking very hard for two days, ever since I saw you once more, after all these years, at Mrs. Birkenshaw's."

"After all—these years!" he repeated, stammeringly. The boldness and candor of her attack caught him off guard.

"Why should we hedge, Mr. Hawxhurst? There is no need of pretence between us, no need of misunderstanding. Our recognition was mutual;—I felt it instinctively as you must have. Let me see.—The last time we encountered each other was before my picture in the Salon,—'La Toute-Puissance'—was it not?

The time before that was in the Casino at Monte Carlo, and the first was at Sheepshead. You saw my associates, you knew what my — my profession was, and then you met me, a guest in your sister's house. Yet you did not immediately denounce me, Mr. Hawxhurst. Why didn't you?"

"Because — because before your arrival, Mrs. Tynedale, my sister had told me something of your work with Miss Marryot, and when you came, and I recognized you, I was curious. I wondered what it all meant, just as I've wondered about you ever since I first saw you."

"But why? Surely, you found me no enigma. The manner of my life must have been to you, as a man of the world, patent from the first."

"There was a mystery clinging to you,—in your eyes, your bearing, your whole atmosphere. 'Potentiality!' That word best describes you — has always described you to me, as fully as anything can. Others recognized it, too. That artist chap in Paris understood,—that picture typifies you.— You knew it was purchased by an American, didn't you? It hangs in the library in my apartments in town. I felt — I *knew* that you were capable of big things. You were unconscious of your own power and strength, perhaps, at first, but it was there, nevertheless,—latent, sleeping, but manifest to other eyes. I wondered, that day at Sheepshead, what you were doing in the environment in which you were, a woman with such strength of character, such possibilities. And each time that I saw you in after years you had developed marvellously; you were fast approaching the time when your character would assert itself. And I found you a fascinating study, although you crossed my path so seldom. I

wondered still more what your history might have been ; — why you had chosen the career upon which you were launched.—”

“ And you still — wonder ? ” she interrupted him, softly.

“ I have guessed, in part,” he returned, gravely.

The appearance of a trim little maid, bearing a huge tea-tray, put a temporary end to the conversation, and they waited in silence while she arranged the little rustic table before them. When she had withdrawn into the house, Mrs. Tyndale served her guest with a steady hand, and then, staring straight before her, she commenced to speak :

“ You saw my people, yesterday. The woman who gave me a glass of water was my sister ; the poor huddled shrunked old creature in the chair by the window was my mother. I have for years been sending them a comfortable allowance, but on my return to America, I sent an agent whom I could trust to investigate conditions in their home, and I found that my money but augmented their wretchedness by giving them opportunities for dissipation and idleness from which the family emerged, when the debauch of the men — my father, and brother, and even my sister’s oldest son, of whom she spoke to you — was over, in an infinitely worse condition than if I had left them alone in their misery. I therefore see that a certain amount is deposited monthly for them in reliable hands, and that it is well spent for their comfort.

“ My father is mercifully dead, my brother has been persuaded to go out to the West. My mother is querulous and broken before her time, as you saw, but she will not leave my sister, who is lazy and slatternly. The condition of the cottage must have been apparent

to you. Please understand that I am not blaming my sister, or any of them. They are as conditions, and environment, and heredity have made them. I mean to change the conditions, so that not only this generation, but those to come, shall benefit by it.

“I was born in that wretched shack on Barren Street, and I worked in those mills — starved, and beaten and abused — ragged, unclean, uneducated!”

He uttered a startled, horrified exclamation, but she went on, unheeding.

“I had no hope for the future, only toil which was breaking me, body and spirit alike. I longed unspeakably, not for beautiful things and a life of ease, so much as I did to know things — the world and the men and women in it, and all that they had discovered and accomplished, and all the beautiful, wonderful things which had been created since the beginning of time. I knew of only one way out — and I took that way. A girl returned to Milltown, a fallen, painted creature who two years before had toiled beside me at the mill. I saw her happy, sparkling, carefree, and in my immature mind I contrasted her with the miserable, white-faced starveling I remembered, and I couldn’t see any justice in the scheme of things. I talked to her — and that night I ran away with the first man at hand, a travelling salesman. From him and his associates I learned much, but I soon outgrew him. I left him for a man who would take me abroad. He was a horse-trainer, and a clean, great-hearted fellow. I left him in turn for a man of title — but why go into any further details of the nauseous story? I went from one man to another for years and years, learning much from each, and bettering myself materially in each experience. But still through it all I remained blind to my own

destiny, to the greatest law of all things, until love came to me, and with its passing I found myself, and knew that I must justify my right to exist. The way to that was made clear to me, and you have beheld the result of the first step. I kept only enough of the money, the price the world had paid me for the slaughter of my womanhood, to maintain me in this simple home, that I might be free and efficient for the task before me. The rest of the money, all the jewels — save this single string of pearls I am wearing now — I threw into my work. The pearls I saved because they were given me by the kindest man I ever knew, the man who loved me best. He is dead, and I kept them in memory of him.

“The man whom I — I loved, never had a thought of me. He was a genius, probably the greatest man of his time, his life given to his work, his heart buried in an old wrong. Years after, I found him broken, dying. It was my sacred privilege to care for him until the end, and the night of his death the revelation came to me, of why I had been permitted to lead my wanton life, unmolested by the hand of God. It was that I might be the sacrifice, for my people. That I might be prepared, because of my bitter experiences, to help those of my kind, of the class from which I had sprung.— That is my story, all of it, Mr. Hawxhurst. Now, what are you going to do?”

“I?” The man turned his deeply-moved face to her, and looked full into her eyes. “What do you mean, Mrs. Tyndale?”

“I am not Mrs. Tyndale, you know. My name is Mary Tinney, and I have changed only the last syllable of my name, and the spelling of the first. I am here under an assumed name, foisting myself off on a

respectable community as one worthy to be a member of it. It is your duty to protect your sister and her friends against imposters, against women of the world from which I have come. Are you going to give me away, Mr. Hawxhurst? To brand me an outcast, to drive me forth from my home in this little quiet backwater of life, from my mission, my work which you have seen and know to be worthy and good? I have never forced myself socially upon any one here. I have shunned society, declined overtures, branded myself a recluse, a philanthropic fanatic. I sought out only the rector from whom I desired help in the work before me, and to him I brought a letter from the minister in the 'Adirondack camp where the man I loved had died, the man whose relations with me had ever been the purest. My accepting your sister's invitation was an exception to my rule, as she will tell you. I went on a sudden, ungovernable impulse — and I met you face to face! It was fate, I suppose — kismet!"

"And if I — if I keep faith with you, what if some other of the many men who have seen you or known you in the course of your career should confront you here, as I have done? What will happen?"

"Ah, should you not speak, I will trust to the future, — I must, of course. I chose this place because it was near Milltown, and because it was so far out of the world that I would be unlikely to meet any one who had known of my life. After all, most of it was lived abroad, you know, and I knew few Americans. It was chance — my meeting with you two days ago. Such another rencontre may not take place in twenty years, here. Are you going to betray me, Mr. Hawxhurst? I am absolutely in your hands. Are you?"

There was a moment's tense pause, and then Porter

Hawxhurst sprang to his feet, and grasped her hand.

"No, Mrs. Tyndale — my God, I'm not!" he cried. "Live here in peace, and carry on the splendid work you have commenced. I shall not interfere; it is not for me to judge you. I shall not cast the first stone!"

She burst into a sudden storm of weeping, her long slender body racked with great sobs which seemed to tear their way from the depths of her being, her head upon the rough stone arm of the bench. He seated himself again, awkwardly, and regarded her in grave understanding.

"Oh, for — forgive me, please!" she sobbed, when she had regained partial control of herself. "I am not given to making scenes, but — but the relief was too great. It was not the thought of the social ostracism which terrified me — it was the giving up of my work — my work which means so much to so many, many people! You are generous, kind! I cannot thank you, Mr. Hawxhurst; I shall not try! But I shall prove to you the wisdom of your decision."

She sat erect, drying her tears and smiling at him, wistfully, with her heart in her eyes. It was as if the first faint ray of sunlight after a purifying rain, had stolen over her delicate face.

"I shall look in on you, if I may, to see how the work goes, every few years. I am off to India in a month, but I shall return in a year or two. Before I go, I shall leave a check for you with my sister, for some more of those little toy cottages you are building. Oh, I say — please don't cry again, Mrs. Tyndale!"

"I'm not! — I'm straightening my hair!" she disclaimed, with a little tremulous laugh. "I must be a fright, and there's no time —" she broke off, and lean-

ing forward, touched the silver bell upon the little table.

“What did you do that for?” he asked, curiously.

“For hot water, and fresh tea-cakes. See!—” she nodded slightly down the flower-bordered path to the stone gate-way. “The rector and his wife are coming for tea!”

FINIS

